



Talk About 2017 Forum

Documenting Promising Practices in Newcomer Clients Services

March 22, 2017



Disclaimer

This document reports the presentations and discussions at the Talk About Forum held on March 22, 2017. The contents of this document (opinions, findings and conclusions) do not reflect the views of the planning group members of the Talk About forum that are Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership, Working Women Community Centre, Toronto Public Health, For You Telecare Family Service and Social Planning Toronto. The planning group members do not guarantee the accuracy of the contents of this document.

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Preamble

Toronto is the prime destination for newcomers in Canada and more Syrian newcomers settled in Toronto during the Syrian refugees' resettlement initiative. Many of the agencies from different sectors have adopted specific strategies and approaches to better serve their newcomer clients. A majority of mentioned strategies and approaches are successful but remain within the usage domain of mentioned agencies.

The Health & Well-being group of Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership (TNLIP) decided to facilitate a discussion among managers and frontline workers of agencies from different sectors serving newcomers to document mentioned approaches, promising practices, and lessons learned. A planning committee was formed and the members included Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership, Social Planning Toronto (SPT), Working Women Community Centre (WWCC), Toronto Public Health (TPH) and For You Telecare Family Services (FUTFS).

Objectives:

- Report back on promising practices and lessons learned in providing services to newcomers with focus on Syrian newcomers
- Discuss different approaches and strategies for serving newcomer clients
- Put forth recommendations for improvement in the client service area

The outcome of this forum is a document for use by frontline workers of multiple sectors as a guiding reference for better serving newcomers.

The Panel Session

I. Lessons from the Syrian Resettlement Program

Speaker: Zena Al Hamdan, Arab Community Centre Toronto (ACCT)

One of the current challenges that has been reported to affect youth under the age of 12 is limited or low literacy skills. This challenge is significant for youth who are transitioning into new schools, as additional time and energy will be required to complete their education. Opportunities for meaningful social interactions and connections are typically limited due to language barriers. Services for children under the age of 12 are scarce, which affects opportunities for early exposure and guidance. Day care supports are limited for LINC students with young children due to high volume and limited resources.

Due to the nature of ACCT being a non-for profit organization, the center is heavily reliant on volunteer expertise and skills to operate services and activities. Challenges would include an unsteady or unpredictable amount of volunteers being accessible and readily available to support the organization. Training volunteers to understand the organization's mission statements and practices can be troublesome, as time and resources need to be allocated. Receiving support from local businesses and other religious groups would require additional time to explain the environment of a settlement sector, and the needs of its community members.

II. Toronto as an Inclusive City

Speaker: Alison Stanley, Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO)

Toronto continues to be the top immigrant destination in Canada. While immigration policy is a responsibility of the federal and provincial governments, municipalities play a key role in welcoming newcomers and supporting the settlement and integration process (e.g. The City of Toronto is responsible for the delivery of more than 50 major services that have an impact on residents). Consultations have identified that the service system can be improved to better help newcomers find skill-appropriate employment, find affordable housing, maintain good health, obtain language training, and navigate the transit system, among others. It has also been identified that newcomers may face barriers in accessing City services, such as a lack of information about City services, inadequate customer service and unintended barriers in service design.

The mandate of the Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO) is to take a leadership role in promoting the inclusion and local prosperity of newcomers in Toronto by facilitating the implementation of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, the Refugee Resettlement Program, and the Integrating Cities Charter. TNO provides management support to the Newcomer Leadership Table and works closely with Local Immigration Partnerships, City divisions, and external stakeholders.

III. Lessons from Service Co-Ordination—“The Hub Model”

Speaker: Luanne Rayvals, (Victoria Park Hub)

The Working Women Community Centre at the Victoria Park/Eglinton Ave location (otherwise known as the “Victoria Park Hub”) is one of the many hubs that are funded by United Way and the Ministry of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The organization’s main goal is to assist in integrating newcomers into the community, and to provide services for families and individuals to feel welcomed. The hub is neighbourhood based and locally responsive. The Hub holds nine core principles as follows:

1. Accessible, engaging and diverse
2. Community members are part of the decision making process
3. Services are provided in collaboration with other member agencies, businesses, and religious affiliations
4. Access to community space
5. Financial sustainability
6. Evaluation

The Hub is dedicated to partnering with other agencies and support centers, in order to provide newcomers with opportunities to enhance their skills, knowledge, and confidence to apply what they already know. Services that are currently running include the “Accelerated Family Integration Program” which provides female cooking classes as well as guidance for parents that plan for their kids to enter future schooling. Other services include trauma counseling, employment assistance, and space for entrepreneurship set-ups. Due to diverse population that it serves and the various needs of the community, the Hub has become a place where individuals have come together to broaden their connections, and a place to exchange experience with others who share the same passion.

The Questions and Answers Session

Question: How can settlement support be given to Syrian refugees by agencies that are not officially recognized as a settlement organization? How can services be enhanced from short-term to long-term solutions? Does the City of Toronto have power to organize settlement agencies together for improving services?

Answer (Zena): Although the agency may not have an official settlement status, this is the time for organizations to work together to provide the best services. Non-traditional services still have a function to help and serve clients in the community. To improve the outlook of unofficial settlement services, it is important to reach out to other organizations in the area to show that these particular services are complementary to what is available, instead of something that is already provided. The LIP is a helpful resource to connect with traditional agencies.

Comment: Most often newcomers and immigrants are unaware of the types and entitlements that they are eligible for. This includes filing tax incomes, claiming taxes, and accessing government benefits. A workshop to inform newcomers about these options and entitlements could take away further stress when integrating to a new country.

Question: A client that is currently enrolled in an English class is required to stay for minimum of 3 months and maximum of 3 years. The client commented on being unaware of any settlement services in the city. Are newly arrived immigrants informed on these types of services when they come to Canada?

Answer (Zena): Newcomers are given packages and the appropriate information to navigate when they first arrive to Canada, but often the information does not sink in. Some may not read the information or understand. Individuals could have visited settlement agencies but not identify them as settlement services. Word of mouth and exchanging information about settlement services is the most effective outreach method.

Answer (Zarine): Some newcomers may be more receptive to information if it is vocally expressed, rather than being written down. For some clients, having information written down on paper is not the best way to know about current services. There are possibilities that clients don't receive a package at all, or a language barrier may be preventing them from understanding what's written.

Question: What are the emerging trends that are being witnessed in newcomer services?

Answer (Luanne): Agencies are unprepared to serve the number of children that are being brought to access services. Many buildings have capacity limits that prevent them from accepting additional children. Newcomers are requiring services and assistance more frequently than ever, and settlement services are required to move quickly to accommodate the influx of clients. An increased support from private organizations and other community groups are being noticed. Some immigrants are also concerned that their needs will not be addressed due to the large volume of Syrian refugees.

Answer (Zena): Due to the relatively young population of immigrants arriving, many new families and couples are unprepared to find appropriate childcare services, or information workshops to gain knowledge. Many are still struggling to navigate and access affordable housing, transit, social services, and mobile devices.

Answer (Alison): There has been increasing availability and flexibility of funders, funding partnerships and collaborations. There has also been an increased positive work that is being done in collaboration with the city and settlement sectors. The large amount of refugees living in shelter systems is a challenge. Due to increased gentrification in the city, finding affordable housing has become tricky.

Question: What are some recommendations to measuring success? How has success been measured in the past?

Answer (Luanne): Acquiring some form of evaluation is important, as it will benefit you in the long run when making future decisions. Partnering strategically will help with your process of doing a final evaluation.

Answer (Zena): Engage with other partners and students to assist with the evaluation process. Offer flexibility to whom you serve and how you can avoid discriminatory practices.

Answer (Alison): It is essential that you have qualitative and a quantitative evaluation. Approach organizations who do consultations to help out. Public or private partnerships are rarely accessed by charities.

The Focus Group Discussion

Participants of the event were numbered into groups of 8-10 people. Each group was then given a set of questions that correlated to their topic of discussion.

Table #1 Outreach and Engagement

1. **What are some techniques you use to meaningfully outreach to newcomers, refugees and immigrants? (at both agency levels and frontline)**
 - Community centers/faith groups
 - Inter-agency networks/share info
 - Politicians
 - Brochures/flyers/ads
 - School/library (info tables)
 - Airport (When newcomers arrive)
 - Social media/website
 - Word of mouth
 - Shelters
 - Community info fair
 - Info sessions
 - Marketing techniques

2. **What are the challenges and barriers you face when outreaching? (at both agency levels and frontline)**
 - Information overload
 - Language
 - Funding
 - Cultural sensitivity/communication with different age groups
 - Lack of collaborations among agencies
 - Dedicated staff time for outreach
 - Restriction (rules in library)
 - Repetitive services
 - Political decisions

3. **How do you encourage engagement of newcomers in community development?**
 - Conversation table/acknowledging skill
 - Community Services Hubs
 - Volunteer
 - Community participation approach/childcare
 - Mentoring
 - Community gardening/events
 - Food bank
 - Using skills and education of newcomers

Table #2 Service Delivery

1. **What are some of the best strategies to deliver services to clients? (At agency level and frontline staff level)**
 - Mobilize agencies, pop up hub at food banks, agencies in the area, health and legal services
 - Community need assessment: questionnaire, discussion group, library visits
 - Provide direct access for health services, housing, settlement at the food bank
 - Networking among existing clients, language specific (income tax, health, legal_
 - Partnership with other agencies
 - Focus on disabilities, intellectual, communication and social media
 - Which connections and needs should be communicated throughout the agency
 - Settlement: information session
 - Engagement
 - Personal connections
 - Inclusion between newcomers and citizens
 - Educating for cultural inclusions

2. **What are the best ways to coordinate referrals?**
 - Forums to build networking with clients
 - Partnerships with other agencies: i.e., employment funding was cut
 - Sharing resources
 - OCMS – ICARES (IRCC)
 - Considering the waiting list
 - Connecting & collaborating with local service providers who do not provide LINC, settlement services
 - Follow up on referred clients
 - Outreach and connections
 - Increasing workload does not permit follow up
 - Most of the newcomers are connected to private/professional agencies. Coordination is important with private/professional agencies
 - Mental health: Using WhatsApp , one on one services and no waiting list

3. **What additional services and programs are there that newcomers need but are not delivered now?**
 - Long waiting list at settlement sector
 - Location and accessibility for available services
 - Specific counseling for career, education, and mental health are not available.
 - Newcomers basic needs not met, challenge to access service.
 - Sponsorship challenges to understand the Canadian culture
 - No services for non-eligible clients
 - Children services not available
 - Funders to have focus on quality of service and not only quantity.

Table #3 Program Development

1. **What are the best ways to engage newcomers in program development?**
 - Ask clients what they require of programs
 - Speak to client staff re: client needs and use this content for programs/workshops and evaluation. This is very insightful for learning
 - Focus groups
 - Client advisory committees-meet once/quarter year
 - Face to face (in language of clients' background) delivery assists with engagement with clients peer/family/friends
 - Constantly/continuously engage clients
 - Integrate information within their community within their language
 - Orientation to Ontario workshops
 - Tailor info workshops to the interest of the clients

2. **Do you periodically review your program methodologies and how do you revise programs based on the results of the review?**
 - After each evaluation, take feedback to make revisions to programs after every month
 - Research informed changes to programs dictates audience modified programmatic changes
 - Internal 3-6-9 month audits
 - Services are individually based (case by case)
 - Pre/post evaluation
 - Internet based surveys are evaluated and are shared.
 - Take clients feedback on board to make modifications
 - Program staff context helps assist with modifications as facilitators
 - Get clients feedback in own language then translate
 - Survey monkey has interactive methods

3. **What are some of the barriers and challenges you face in program development or delivery?**
 - Funding limitations
 - Would like to reach non-status and Canadians with systemic barriers but often limited. Parameters can be a biggest barrier (system can be oppressive and set clients up for challenges)
 - Disconnection with what funders want and what reality is, have to provide data that may not be captured easily/succinctly within defined timelines/scope
 - Definition of what agency is mandated to do and the outreach and follow up that needs to happen.
 - Try to make the best of the limitations, still see clients regardless of limitations and do best as we can
 - Cultural barriers, take time to address
 - Address barriers as they relate to needs
 - Attitudes where people lose interest to continue on because they have not invested in themselves, the weight of challenges breaks the will of clients because of trauma

- Isolation is a big barrier
 - The lack of recognition of Newcomers' educational or employment backgrounds back home or position in their families
 - Newcomer's timing/readiness to receive programming/support
 - People want a space to be heard/to have their trauma identified and addressed: facilitation of safe space, training of the organization to be able to address the things difficult to be spoken of will help promote effective program delivery. Have space to listen.
 - Confidentiality and sensitivity of personal information, sharing that back to client so trust can develop
 - Client readiness and receptivity is key to motivation
 - Digital storytelling can assist with connection
4. **How do you create partnerships when you are creating programs?**
- Networking at events to find out which agencies align best with our mandate. Each agency has unique mandate so honorarium to smaller agencies so they can bring clients under an umbrella (because smaller groups don't have capacity)
 - Targeted outreach to engage agencies not already working with, cold calling and outreach
 - Scan newspapers/internet and then link to those opportunities/agencies that are profiled to let them know what to do that resulted in pilot project.
 - Word of mouth through existing partnerships
 - Strength of relationship, success of existing relationships can create access to more informal client bases
 - Making sure that rather than duplication of services, the enhancement of services occur. Build relationships, create memorandum of understanding
 - Referrals help bring clients in
 - Partnerships can sometimes be developed with funding opportunities

Table #4 Space

1. **What are the best strategies in creating safe and culturally appropriate spaces for newcomers?**
 - Collaborating with the community
 - Open space: enhanced customer service, language diversity, cultural relevant space, providing opportunities for leadership roles, encouraging a respectful environment, safety hazards, designated religious-prayer space (privacy), flexible to the needs of clients!
 - Educating, variety of programs, services and activities, volunteering; equal platforms, vocalizing human rights.
2. **What are some of the lessons you've learned in creating safe spaces, what works, what doesn't?**
 - User/clients direct how to use their time-create their own agenda
 - Collaborating with other spaces/resources (field trips): volunteer driven workshops

- What doesn't work?: lack of time/money/resources (i.e. Transit navigation), clients intimidated by seeking assistance/resources

3. What are the challenges and barriers in creating safe spaces for newcomers?

- Transportation
- Finances
- Lack of space
- Isolation
- Lack of knowledge
- Intimidation: fear of discrimination
- Language barriers

Conclusions

The forum was well attended and the participants outnumbered those registered by having a big number of walk-ins. The participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss their experiences and lessons learned with each other. Participants recommended to continue conducting the forum in future.

Some major gaps and challenges in serving newcomers were pointed out at the forum. They include but not limited to the need for more collaboration and partnerships, research to make services responsive to the needs of newcomers, effective referral and follow ups, services and programs for youth newcomers and sustainable funding. In addition to, there's need for more awareness, guidelines and service navigation tools for newcomers.

Partnerships and coordination is key in reaching out to more immigrants, creating a safe space and provision of quality service packages. Community service hubs, inter-agency networks, local immigration partnerships and other coordination mechanisms are good examples. Using different service coordination models tailored to immigrants needs such as pop up hubs, community events etc., play important role in increased coverage. Coordination and collaboration with wide range of city services is essential in meeting the service demands of newcomers.

Agencies may consider prior need assessments and research to identify best ways to reach out to and provide services to newcomers taking into account educational background, culture, language, timing, transportation, accessibility etc. Creating responsive referral systems and procedures and follow ups helps in better serving the needs of newcomers and preventing defaults.

Development of user friendly system and services navigation guidelines, brochures and online tools help service providers and newcomers to find appropriate services that meets their needs.

Sustainability of programs and long term financial commitment from funders is another key factor in newcomers' settlement and integration. Continuous services helps newcomers trust the settlement sector and increase in utilization of the services by them.

Annexes

Annex -1: Biographies of Panelists

Zena Al Hamdan, (The Arab Community Centre)

Zena Al Hamdan holds a managerial position at the Arab Community Centre of Toronto where she specializes in counseling, settlement and front line work concerning the needs of new immigrants and refugees applicants. Zena has worked for over ten years in understanding the impacts of transitioning, cultural changes, social isolation, displacement, and trauma. Working alongside the Arab Community Centre (ACCT), Zena has helped serve some of the few 2,800 privately and publicly sponsored refugees seeking culturally sensitive space, settlement services, and counseling. The overall goal of the ACCT is to enhance skills, provide innovating programs to meet the needs of participants, promote the wellbeing of all participants, and to create a space where all communities and cultures are welcomed.

Alison Stanley, (Toronto Newcomer Office)

Alison Stanley is a Community Development Officer with the City of Toronto's Newcomer Office. Alison is an experienced professional with a strong policy and research background, and has worked with Deloitte Canada, various City Divisions, the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, the Canadian Healthcare Association, and Oxfam Canada. Alison has a Master's degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies from Ryerson University.

Luanne Rayvals, (Victoria Park Hub)

Luanne Rayvals is the manager at southeast location of Working Women Community Centre. Luanne has seven years of managerial experience in the settlement sector that allows her to effectively oversee community development programs, services, and involvement. With over 20 years of organizational development, fundraising, and research, Luanne processes exceptional skills and knowledge in leading and improving the lives of community members.

Annex -2: The Program

TALK ABOUT: Documenting Promising Practices in Clients' Service Area

Mar 22, 9:00am – 2:00pm

Room # W204, the Peoples Church, 374 Sheppard Ave E

Time	Topic	Presenter/Facilitator
9:00- 9:30am	Networking & Breakfast	
9:30 - 9:45am	Welcome & Introductions	TNLIP
9:50 -10:05am	Lessons from the Syrian Refugees Resettlement Process	Huda Bukhari Arab Community Centre
10:05-10:20am	Toronto as an Inclusive City Charter, Policies and Services	Alison Stanley Toronto Newcomer Office
10:20 – 10:35am	Lessons from Services Coordination Using the Hub Model	Luanne Lyval Victoria Park Hub
10:35-11:05am	Questions & Answers Presenters	
11:05-11:15am	Break	
11:15am -12:15pm	Break out Into Groups	
12:15 - 12:45pm	Presentations of the Groups	Group Reps
12:45-1:00pm	Wrap Up & Evaluations	TNLIP
1:00-2:00pm	Networking and Lunch	

Annex -3: Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire

Questions for the TALK ABOUT Forum Break Out Session

Theme	Questions	Facilitators/note takers
Table 1 Outreach & Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some techniques you use to meaningfully outreach to newcomers, refugees and immigrants?(at both agency levels and frontline) 2. What are the challenges and barriers you face when outreaching (at both agency levels and frontline)? 3. How do you encourage engagement of newcomers in community development 	Zarine
Table 2 Service Provision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some of the best strategies to deliver services to clients? (From agency level and frontline staff level). 2. What are the best ways to coordinate referrals? 3. What additional services and programs newcomers need that are not delivered now. 	Tahir
Table 3 Program Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the best ways to engage newcomers in program development? 2. Do you periodically review your program methodologies and how do you revise programs based on the results of the review? 3. What are some of the barriers and challenges you face in program development or delivery? 4. How do you create partnerships when you are creating programs? 	Christie
Table 4 Space	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some of the best strategies in creating safe and culturally appropriate spaces for newcomers 2. What are some of the lessons you've learned in creating safe spaces, what works, what doesn't? 3. What are the challenges and barriers in creating safe spaces for newcomers 	Sueyon & Talisha