

Creating welcoming environments and spaces for meaningful engagement



Training Report
November 2015



Background

Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world. Half of Toronto's population was born outside of Canada. Toronto's rich multicultural diversity is expressed by the more than 200 distinct ethnic origins residents identified in their response to the 2006 Census.¹ This growing cultural mosaic is creating new reality for Toronto. It opens up new possibilities for learning and growth. Increased diversity inherently brings with new talents, capacities and perspectives that can be canalized to create more innovative, creative and prosperous society for all. With various talents, capacities and perspectives which can be canalized for creating a more prosperous society for all. All too often however, our biases prevent us from seeing possibilities that this new reality brings.

Interacting with the barriers our biases create is the multiple barriers immigrants face when settling in Canadian society. Immigrants struggle because of different language and culture, youth face particular challenges “belonging” to their new communities and incorporating new and old ways. According to a 2006 study that examines Statistics Canada's Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), Canadian immigrants face many additional difficulties. They experience challenges having foreign credentials recognized, they lack Canadian job experience, and they are often subject to discrimination in labour markets. Other studies identify learning a new language, making friends, finding affordable housing – even coping with the Canadian weather – as common difficulties.²

Against this backdrop, creating inclusive and welcoming environment takes on a particular importance and attention. How do we create more inclusive environments where individuals not matter their background or experience can draw upon their talents to contribute to their community, workplace and the city? For many individuals who are new to a city, local community organizations, schools or libraries become their first point of contact and much time will be spent interacting with these entities. As those working in the field of human service delivery the creation of inclusive and welcoming environments is something that has to be constantly revisited.

In October the TN LIP convened 17 individuals from 14 various agencies in a training focused on creating welcoming environments and spaces for meaningful engagement for newcomers and residents. The training sought to initiate a conversation with those working in the human

¹ <http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=dbe867b42d853410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

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http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/05/08/national_household_survey_immigration_dramatically_changing_makeup_of_toronto_and_canada.html



service sector around the environments they are creating in which newcomers access support. The session touched upon various topics such as: reflective practice, assumptions and biases that effect our work, and engaging those we serve in co-learning – that residents are engaged in the co-design, co-delivery, and co-review of programming.



Methodology and Approach of the Training

Although the session could be seen as a “training” the facilitators were conscious not to create an environment where there was a “trainer” and “trainees”. The training was not presentation based rather it employed a participatory approach. The training session was explorative, participatory and conversation based. Through conversation and dialogue the participants explored the concepts presented and shared their thoughts and experience around them.

The training then sought to initiate a conversation with those working in the human service sector around the environment created in which newcomers access support. Participants were told that in engaging in a collective dialogue they could learn from the knowledge and experience of others. To assist with this, the facilitator sought to ask questions to spark dialogue either from the conversation or the workbook that was created. The facilitators consciously chose not to use PowerPoint presentations and had the participants sit around in a circle.

In addition to making the approach of the training explicit, the participants also explored the methodology of action, reflection and conversation that would be a way of generating learning and change. The training incorporated all these elements in the training – reflective practice, conversations on assumptions and biases and finally taking action by planning. The participants were also encouraged to use this methodology in their day to day work.

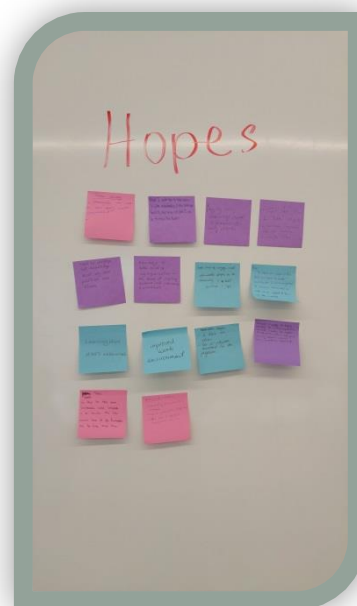


Hopes and Motivations

We started the session with asking participants to identify their hopes for the day and what motivated them to attend.

Many were motivated to attend out of desire to learn more about the topic and from others. Other motivators and hopes for the day included:

- Meeting and networking
- Learning about positive changes in communication
- To gain a new perspective and view of how to community development is practiced
- Gain and understand better approach to carry out my work
- Gain information on how to make approach towards newcomer clients to be more positive
- Need for developing self-knowledge about my own practices and biases
- Tips for how to better integrate and welcome newcomers into employee and volunteer roles
- Improved work environment



During this initial conversation it became clear that all were motivated out of a desire to become better at the work they do. Many noted that there were rarely opportunities for workers to sit and reflect on their practice in this way and learn and share from one another.



Training Content

The content of the training was a result of ongoing conversations among the Toronto North LIP team and partners. Some of content and activities were modified and adapted from the materials of the trainings offered by the North West Toronto Service Collaborative led by CAMH. The content used by the NW Toronto Service Collaborative was adapted with permission from documents created by Jana Vinsky for Liberation Practice International (www.liberationeducation.com). A workbook was created and guided the discussion and activities for the day.



At the beginning of the session we made explicit the premise we were working within: that all newcomers and all residents represent a deep reservoir of talents and capacities and as those working within the social service sector, we need to think about how this idea can be a guiding principle for our actions to assist us in meaningfully engaging newcomers and all residents in the community.

The training focused on three broad areas that influence the ability of individual to create welcoming environments and meaningfully engage newcomers and residents. These areas include:

- Reflective practice
- Assumptions, Biases, and Stereotypes at the individual, societal and organization level
- Co-learning with clients

Reflective Practice

Participants explored what reflective practice is, how they are already utilizing it both formally and informally, the benefits of reflecting and how they can incorporate it into their work.

Assumptions, Biases, and Stereotypes at the individual, societal and organization level

Participants explored how assumptions, biases and stereotypes are challenges in creating welcoming and inclusive environments. They explored these at the individual, societal and organizational level.

Co-learning with clients

Participants explored how they could work with individuals and families they serve as valued partners in the design, delivery, and review of all aspects of service.



Participation and Feedback

Given the nature of the training, the facilitators wanted to cap participation at about 20 individuals. On the day of the training 17 individuals attended across 14 organizations.

Of those who filled out the evaluation form all indicated that they would be able to take back what they learned to their organization. 93% of the respondent rated the usefulness of the session as either useful or very useful. 93% of the respondents rated the content of the session as either good or excellent.

Below are a few responses from what participants about what they liked most about the session:

“Reflection, conversation and networking.”

“Self-reflection about our own assumptions. Reflecting on the assumptions and biases that I have.”

“The engagement factor and the info being presented.”

“The interactive way the session was created and run.”

“I liked that it was inclusive and there was a lot of participation and group discussion so we could learn from one another and get to know about other organizations.”

“It wasn’t a teaching, presentation style. Everyone was involved from beginning to end. The exchange of experiences.”

“The sharing and ability to interact with others in the same position/sector.”

“I liked the planning tools and enjoyed the discussion on co-design, co-delivery and co-review.”

“The booklet was excellent!”

“The group engagement and participation. It was great to have this kind of topic as a conversation.”

Participants also shared the most valuable piece of information they gained at the training. Below are some responses:

“Co-design and co-delivery. Understanding assumption and biases.”



"The methodology we used."

"Making assumptions and using reflective tools"

"Greater knowledge of reflective practices, co-design, co-delivery, and co-review process."

"The most valuable piece of information I gathered was the co-design, review and delivery model. It is the type of model we try to use in community development. I will definitely use this model to analyze any program and project I am a part of."

"The talk on HIV and how we should offer services available no matter who we are serving."

"Awareness is so important and reflection is paramount to improving."

A few areas of improvement included: having more concrete tips and strategies, content that participants can take away for implementation, and engaging managers. During the final reflection the need to engage management was raised by participants. It became clear that without the support and commitment of management what was learned would be hard to move beyond the individuals.

Next Steps

Currently, a few next steps have been identified which the TN LIP staff team will be pursuing:

- 1) Modifying the training content based on October session
- 2) Offer the training to teams within member organizations
- 3) Explore the possibility of engaging management in a conversation around training for staff



Appendix 1 – Participant Agenda

CREATING WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS AND SPACES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

October 20, 2015

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Parkway Forest Community Centre

9:00 AM	Registration
9:30 AM	Welcome and Introductions
10:00 AM	Reflective Practice
10:30 AM	BREAK
10:40 AM	Reflective Practice
11:00 AM	Conversation: Assumptions, Biases and Stereotypes
12:00 PM	LUNCH
12:45 PM	Conversation: Assumptions, Biases and Stereotypes
1:15 PM	Action – Wisdom Café
2:20 PM	BREAK
2:30 PM	Action – Wisdom Café
3:10 PM	Action – Individual Planning
3:30 PM	Closing



Appendix 2 – Reflective Tool

Date:

What did I do?

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Feelings

What aspect of the event went well?	What was not so good?

Learning

What were my desired learning outcomes?	Where does it link in or combine with my existing knowledge?



What have I learnt from the experience?

Conclusions

What do I need to do next?

How can I put my learning into practice in another situation?



Appendix 3 – Co-Learning Planning Cards

Modified by Peer Positive Training by North West Toronto Service Collaborative led by CAMH

Ask the community

Conduct consultations with your community and formally report on these consultations.

Invite participation in research

Gather data on your community using a participatory approach
“nothing about us, without us”.

Ask for feedback on how you can improve

Take existing opportunities to ask those you serve for feedback on how you can improve your relationship and better partner with them.



Partner for program delivery

Find an opportunity to partner with those you serve to offer a program or lead an activity.

Invite your clients to inform grant proposals

Make time to ask individuals or groups for input, listen to their ideas and integrate their perspective into your planning.

Invite participation in research

Collect satisfaction data to adapt and adjust programming regularly based on feedback.



**Increase Reflective Practice among
supervisors and staff**

Embed reflective practice in sessions with
staff.

Partner for program delivery

Find an opportunity to partner with those
you serve to offer a program or lead an
activity.

Invite input into the board of directors

Explore options for peer input into the
Board of Directors



Make space for reflection

Designate a time for your team to reflect together on their current practices, learning and approaches.

Increase channels for feedback

Find ways to enhance current feedback channels and encourage anonymous feedback that can be acted upon.

Develop accessible resources and program materials

Offer resources for specific ethno-specific communities.



**Engage clients and residents in staff
trainings**

Explore possibilities for bringing in clients and residents to co-facilitate trainings, share their perspectives and/or inform training content.

**Increase Reflective Practice among
supervisors**

Build reflective practice into management meetings.

Conduct a policy review

Take some time to review your current organizational policies with an eye toward equity, inclusivity and the engagement or residents.



Collaboration in assessment and planning

Develop individual goals or plan in collaboration with those you serve.

Embed equity into hiring process

Embed equity into rubrics or checklists used in hiring committee interviews.

Make your commitment visible

Allocate a dedicated budget or resources for activities focused on inclusivity and anti-oppression.



**Invite those you serve to inform
organizational direction**

Create formal and/or confidential mechanisms for the community to offer feedback and review at leadership level.

Establish coaching pairs within the staff

Pair staff together to coach and support each other in reflection, taking action on inequities and patterning with clients.

