

Richmond

Community Dialogues Emergence, Adaptation and Resilience



On March 10th, 2022, NewToBC brought together 27 community members representing newcomers, library representatives, and immigrant service providers from the community of Richmond. These attendees gathered to network and provide input to current immigrant settlement and integration barriers and issues that newcomers are currently facing, and learn about the innovations on service delivery in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. The following is a summary of the observations, ideas, and perspectives shared by participants.

CHALLENGES THAT NEWCOMERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE CURRENTLY FACING

- “I recently came to Canada and found it difficult to find resources. After 7 months, I discovered WorkBC next to my home and found employment resources at my library.”
- “I volunteered as a Library Champion and helped and mentored others. It’s been tough, but we’ve held each other’s hands, and I hope we’re coming out of it.”
- Biggest challenges for newcomer services at the library are: promotion of programs and resources to newcomers, and removing language barriers
- Isolation and income loss has affected people’s health; newcomers don’t know where to find help

- Many newcomers don’t have income for computers so are using phones to access services; seniors were particularly vulnerable, many not having digital skills and exacerbating isolation
- Racism needs to be addressed; it is a heavy weight on Chinese people, on top of what everyone else is dealing with
- Moving to blended delivery of LINC was challenging

INNOVATIONS ADOPTED / ENCOUNTERED

Responses to isolation and mental health issues

- S.U.C.C.E.S.S. created a new position (Health and Wellness Coordinator) that provides one-on-one services, workshops, COVID education, yoga classes
- Pen Pal program: addressing isolation of seniors and writing skills of teens
- Buddy system where people in the community are paired to share resources and create an opportunity to connect (to community members, library or service provider staff)

Digital responses

- As a newcomer: started using WhatsApp for different purposes e.g. mothers with young kids; international students; job openings, tips on resume-building, LinkedIn support
- Worked with seniors through community orgs to help them connect with their families

- Joined FB groups to reach out to pre-arrivals, giving them a heads up about housing, etc.
- Online programming allowed libraries to increase capacity to provide newcomer support
- Library's use of WeChat was key in promoting services (especially in Chinese). "Many newcomer programs have seen a big jump after workshops are posted on WeChat".
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S. created the position of Digital Navigator: "learning by doing" services that responds to people's digital needs e.g. setting up phones, writing emails, government applications, downloading apps, helping students use learning platforms (e.g. Moodle)
- Digital literacy English class: 3 cohorts in a year receiving digital literacy services in Chinese; developing no in other languages (Dari, Arabic)

Partnerships

- Long-time relationship between SUCCESS and Libraries allowed for strong programming through the pandemic; many accessed settlement, and employment services through the library including an online Job Fair to recruit newcomers
- Opportunity for collaboration to reach a broader audience e.g. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. designs program for specific language group, and library adapts to a broader audience

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS / REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Other ideas for to respond to isolation and digital literacy issues

- Importance of getting out to people in the community; reaching people where they are at; scheduling and structural support is important
- Role of digital literacy in empowering women

- Media/information/statistical literacy (to tackle dis/misinformation), which very much intertwined with digital literacy
- Need to understand the human side of using technology/solving "tech" problems; human-focussed programmers

Access to Information

- Address language barriers: service providers need resources to address all languages so they can understand newcomer needs
- Need an easy-to-find overview/list of services for immigrants to access
- New Afghan refugees in Richmond who are illiterate in their own language highlights the importance of libraries in connecting newcomers to resources in their community

CONVERSATIONS MOVING FORWARD

What are the opportunities to grow our services across populations, leveraging connections with previous newcomers, and promoting across programs and organizations?

How can we create spaces for dialogue and better share information and resources to support newcomers in overcoming language and digital literacy barriers?

Recognizing that we are all impacted by the challenges times we are in, what roles can empathy and trauma-informed approaches play in responding to issues such as isolation and racism?

About NewToBC

NewToBC is a library settlement initiative that connects immigrants and refugees with essential settlement information, public libraries, other service provider organizations, and, ultimately, BC communities. NewToBC plays a unique role in the settlement sector by offering services that are responsive to the evolving needs of newcomers, that complement and raise awareness about resources and services offered by public libraries and other service provider organizations, and that support BC communities as they welcome growing newcomer populations.

For more info on the NewToBC, check out our website at <https://newtobc.ca/> or contact **Ben Hart**, NewToBC Project Coordinator.

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