

Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, & Port Moody

Community Dialogues Emergence, Adaptation and Resilience



On March 2nd, 2022, NewToBC brought together 27 community members representing newcomers, library representatives, and immigrant service providers from the Tri-Cities communities of Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody. 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

- *“Since coming to Canada, I had been trying to find a job in my area of work; when the pandemic arrived, my contract was cancelled; I was anxious, finding I needed to start again; I was overcome by fear”.*
- Hardest thing is how to reach people who don't know the library and its services
- Regional consideration: Tri-Cities is made up of five municipalities and clients come with diverse needs
- With the reduction of in-person services, clients with digital literacy challenges suffered the most (many over 50 who usually accessed services in person)
- Difficult for those with low English language ability to find out about opportunities to improve their skills

- There is high enrolment in programs, but tech challenges hold participants back

INNOVATIONS ADOPTED / ENCOUNTERED

Library Champions Project (LCP) is seen as continuing education

- Newcomers supporting newcomers, sharing information about the library and raising visibility of libraries and library services
- *“The LCP helped me participate in the community and respond to people in the pandemic context”.*

Meeting people where they're at

- Libraries made an effort to be out in the community; to *“show up where the library isn't and the people are”* e.g., parks, summer camps, Coquitlam mobile library bus with stops in parks, community centres, schools where people can get a library card, borrow books
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S. provided services based on clients' needs to keep them connected to their community; new activities included clearing the shoreline, thank you letters to hospital workers, Valentines to seniors
- Newcomers are using smartphones to access program information

Technology Push

- S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and other organizations worked to improve digital literacy: helping people operate tablets to attend community initiatives, helping prevent internet fraud, supporting access to internet services, inviting clients to the office for their online Citizenship ceremony.

- *“Online training made my experience easier and empowered me to work on my economic independence”.*

Being flexible and responsive to keep people connected

- A *“quick pivot”* was demanded of so many organizations during COVID
- During the pandemic, though the buildings were closed, the library never closed
- City of Coquitlam public sharing initiatives: ‘Let’s Talk about Coquitlam’; engages newcomers

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS / REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Keeping people connected

- Lack of informal opportunities for people to make friends
- As people come out of conflict zones, finding ways for them to connect is so important

Volunteers

- S.U.C.C.E.S.S. engages many volunteers for online support (language classes) and we need to gauge volunteers’ comfort with in-person support. Volunteers are asked to do a lot - we must be cautious of burnout.
- Is there a way to use school kids who are used to using computers and need volunteer hours to help seniors?
 - Library is just starting a volunteer program and will look to engage students to help with computer skills
- *“Everything is possible in Canada if you have the support you need; I want to provide people with the support that I have gotten myself”.*

Mentorship programs

- Library is doing one; *“I did this myself with a HOST program, and she is my best friend”.*

- Douglas College Career Pathways is pairing up clients with similar career interests
- MOSAIC has settlement-oriented mentorship
- Connecting newcomers with other immigrants is great - they *“get you”*, reducing people’s sense of isolation
- Immigrant Hub in some libraries where newcomers gather informally

Complexity of providing services

- Need more services for temporary residents
- You can’t take for granted that everyone will know what to expect from services

Create a YouTube series: First Week in the Life of Newcomers

- It’s there for newcomers to access when they need e.g., the first episode tells a story about what you need when you first arrive
- It allows newcomers to share with their families at home what their life is like

Conversations Moving Forward

How can we create different kinds of *“mentorship”* (career, settlement, neighbourhood) opportunities with newcomers?

What are the innovative and effective ways we can reach newcomers? What are the roles newcomer-centred design and technology can play?

Recognizing that some of the best ideas are already being offered, how can we make sure we are sharing our best practices and innovative ideas?

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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