

Vancouver

# Community Dialogues Emergence, Adaptation and Resilience



On March 24th, 2022, NewToBC brought together 31 community members representing newcomers, library representatives, and immigrant service providers from the community of Vancouver. 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

- “As a newcomer, everything is different. My cooking skills hadn’t changed, so why does everything taste different in Canada?”
- Newcomers come prepared, with names of organizations, programs, and ideas about how life is going to be, “but it’s the day-to-day of getting kids to school, re-learning how to spend our leisure time, cooking for our families that makes the biggest difference.”
- Libraries faced many challenges going online: supporting clients with digital literacy barriers, sporadic internet, different versions of Zoom, communication with masks, mental health and social anxiety exacerbated by limited language ability

- Newcomers have a diversity of expectations of libraries. “How do we let people know about our programs and services if they’re not following our websites or social media?”
- Service provider: “Trying to understand the changing needs of immigrants and refugees and tailoring services was difficult. We had to rethink how we are providing services, especially supporting clients with limited computer and language skills e.g. for clients without a computer, it was very difficult to fill out an application over the phone.”
- Supporting Government-assisted refugees in their first 3 weeks. “Picking people up at the airport, quarantines, temporary housing, organizing COVID tests - it forced us to be creative and find opportunities.”

## INNOVATIONS ADOPTED / ENCOUNTERED

- “As a newcomer, my favourite public service organization is the VPL. I could apply online for my library card and use online resources even before arriving in Canada.”
- Libraries served newcomers while they carried on with their lives (cooking dinner, etc). “We reached beyond our geographic boundaries - in Metro Van and other countries
- Low stakes gatherings; e.g. conversation groups allow hosts to tune into the tone and support mental health in natural ways

- Put time and attention into land acknowledgments and supported conversation circles with information about indigenous people
- Service provider: “Main innovation is shifting workshops, orientations, etc. online. People with limited technological abilities were trained in their first language.”
- Used WhatsApp, but it was unpopular at the time, so shifted to Telegram
- Mass text messaging to keep clients informed about COVID, organizational policies, procedures for appointments etc
- Creative ways to keep clients engaged; e.g. volunteer mentorship program where people learn together and form friendships online
- Allowed us to reflect on our staff digital ability. “We found many differences and did staff training to bring everyone to a similar comfort level.”
- Being flexible with programming; e.g. bike mentorship program was extended in the summer because there was a need for people to be out and about

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS / REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

### VPL Resources

- Sign up for library card online: <https://www.vpl.ca/librarycard>
- Soundproof rooms e.g. to record voice overs for YouTube videos
- Resources like LinkedIn learning need to be more widely shared
- People also need to know they can ask for more time at the help-desk e.g. to complete an application for extending their visa

- A library resources brochure could be given to all newcomers
- Libraries should do a program about how to find housing and housing resources (buying and renting)

### Models and Programming Needs

- Hybrid model will be helpful moving forward, but we need to consider if patrons will come in-person. Some programs e.g. book clubs would be hard in a hybrid format. Will also need to continually address digital literacy
- Non-Canadian work experience needs to be recognized and valued
- “Newcomers are at different points in settlement and have various needs. As service providers we need to work from client needs, not what we think they need.”
- Gaps in programming and support: international students, temporary workers, and grandparents who have come to support young families

## CONVERSATIONS MOVING FORWARD

What digital and print tools can be developed to inform newcomers of the multitude of resources available to them at the VPL?

What mechanisms can settlement providers leverage to ensure that newcomer needs and experiences are incorporated into programs and services?

How can we move forward in a hybrid/work-at-home environment and at the same time promote and sustain healthy work cultures?

## 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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