

Burnaby & New Westminister

Community Dialogues Emergence, Adaptation and Resilience



On February 24th, 2022, NewToBC brought together 43 community members representing newcomers, library representatives, and immigrant service providers from the communities of Burnaby and New Westminister. 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

- Isolation for many newcomers has been the biggest challenge, especially during COVID (including quarantining upon arrival and no chance to connect with others)
- For library staff one of the biggest challenges was communicating with newcomers in different languages, and communication was also made worse by masks
- Digital tools helped service providers reach more people, but sadly not to those who needed it the most; *“Not being able to help in the way I wanted to was very emotionally challenging”*
- Need for more service coordination; *“none of us in the group knew what the other was offering”*

- Transitioning from remote delivery to a hybrid model of delivery
- Isolation experienced by seniors
- Newcomer need access to technology and training e.g. free cell phones, Wi-Fi, computers
- Awareness building amongst stakeholders of all the available programs; *“none of us in the group knew what the other was offering”*. We need to share our work

INNOVATIONS ADOPTED / ENCOUNTERED

- *“Library Champions Project allowed me to connect with other people, build confidence and develop language”*; I personally reached 200 newcomers
- MOSAIC immunization clinics, targeting 10 different ethno-cultural communities

Technology

- Use of social media including WhatsApp and Messenger to connect with clients
- According to a survey of newcomers conducted by MOSAIC, hybrid services are preferred; virtual programs and services are here to stay
- Burnaby Libraries developed Wi-Fi hotspots that can be accessed in clients' homes; also developed five hotspots for service providers

Collaboration

- Burnaby service providers have developed a Primary Care Network - a practical approach for our shared clients including newcomers experiencing isolation

- Engaging not only existing partners but also new community members in settlement
- The Burnaby Youth Wrap Around Project; a partnership between Burnaby School District, Douglas College, MOSAIC and a private counselling service

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS / REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Volunteerism

- Need for more volunteer programs for newcomers to meet mentors and where volunteers can become trainers
- Some organizations have restrictions on how many volunteer positions they can offer
- Inspiring volunteer work: Newcomers cooking traditional foods for the homeless

Youth

- Which programs do you think are effective for youth in the Burnaby / New Westminster area? Do we see new trends in how to reach out to youth?
- How can we help youth understand for themselves what they need, and then empower them by supplying the information they need to solve their own problems?

Reaching new arrivals

- What are the best strategies to reach and let recent arrivals know of community programs?

Social Isolation

- Social isolation is a huge issue
- Caring for newcomers' basic needs first, and then employment, helps build their sense of belonging and dignity
- It is important for newcomers to make social connections, and volunteer programs are a good way to do this; service providers are encouraged to find volunteer positions for newcomers

- Libraries can be used as a way to reach out to newcomers with volunteer opportunities

Other issues and insights

- Recognition that our work is never static
- Service providers need to do more to connect newcomers to employers
- No newcomer is the same, so they need tailored and relevant skills
- Need to diversify the funding that comes to newcomers to make sure refugee claimants, naturalized citizens, international students, and others still get support
- More funding and opportunities to address digital literacy and social isolation
- Lots of challenges and opportunities that resonated: social isolation is prevalent; hybrid models are the way forward; need to recognize the power of volunteerism

Conversations Moving Forward

Given hybrid models are the way forward, what are the opportunities to address access to technology and digital literacy?

How can volunteerism help address the social isolation newcomers are experiencing?

With strong consensus that collaboration between providers is key, what structures exist that allow us to keep sharing information and resources, and provide wholesome responses to the complex needs of newcomers?

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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