

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY: NEWCOMERS IN MISSISSAUGA

A Report from the
Community Knowledge Forum
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Overview of the Foundation

The Community Foundation of Mississauga is part of one of the fastest growing charitable movements in Canada. The Foundation is a registered charitable public foundation that was launched in spring 2001. Since that time, it has grown rapidly and has over \$20 million in endowed assets and cumulative grants of over \$8 million. Community foundations across Canada share three fundamental roles:

One: Endowment building/personalized service. The Foundation builds endowed and other funds to provide lasting support for local priorities. It makes giving easy and effective, accepting a wide variety of gifts and providing donors with a number of charitable options. Donors can contribute cash, stocks, property and other assets. Donors may establish a fund in their name or in the name of a loved one. In most cases, a gift qualifies for maximum tax advantage under federal law.

Two: Local grantmaking expertise. The Foundation's staff and volunteers have an in-depth understanding of the issues, opportunities, and resources that shape our community. It evaluates all aspects of community well-being – including social services, education, the environment, health care, youth, seniors and the arts and then makes grants to support the broadest range of community needs. It can help donors learn more about local organizations and programs that make a difference in areas they care about most.

Three: Community leadership. Because community foundations support all kinds of charities, it is well positioned to bring people and organizations together, convening diverse voices to address local issues and opportunities. The Foundation's business is building community.

Capturing Community Knowledge

Bridging the needs of the community with philanthropy is at the heart of the Community Foundation of Mississauga. This includes building a base of knowledge about the issues affecting the community, bringing together the people who live and work in the city to hear what they have to say, connecting organizations serving the community, sharing information, identifying gaps and opportunities and considering innovative ideas that can be part of the solution to addressing community needs. Collaborating is one of the ways a community foundation stays connected to the purpose we serve. It helps keep vital knowledge and communication flowing.

Trends and Statistics

Why should we devote time to discussing the delivery of services and programs to newcomers in Mississauga?

Our recent Mississauga's Vital Signs 2015 report included issues facing newcomers to Mississauga. Over half of Mississauga's population was born outside of Canada... the majority of the city. According to the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group, Peel region has the highest percentage of newcomers in the GTA (50.5%). Our planning committee for this forum, the Community Leadership Committee, began to imagine what a conversation about newcomers could mean.

First of all: who are we talking about? Newcomers in Mississauga are a highly diverse group, including people born in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, China, Iraq, Egypt, Sri Lanka, United States, Colombia, United Arab Emirates and many others. Newcomers also tend to be young. Of all newcomers to Mississauga, 41.81% are between the ages of 25 to 44 at the time of immigration. (2011 statistics). Newcomers are often highly educated. Yet even so, there can be struggles with language, obtaining employment (let alone employment with a living wage), isolation and poverty. According to a recent report from Peel Halton Local Employment Planning Council, recent immigrants have higher unemployment rates than other groups in Canada. This is to say nothing of all the challenges facing refugees, who have come to Canada for so many reasons.

Given the immense challenges faced by newcomers, any discussion about newcomers can be overwhelming. Fauzia Khan, Settlement Manager and Family Counsellor at Afghan Women's Organization Peel reminds us that "Every newcomer has their own unique experience and needs therefore we need to be flexible in providing support and delivering services."

Behind every story, is a person, a family, who is unique. Far from abstract or theoretical, this is a deeply personal issue affecting so many in Mississauga and this serves to motivate and drive the discussion forward.

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

Our forum guests reflected the diversity of Mississauga organizations committed to serving newcomers. These organizations include:

Afghan Women's Organization

Centre for Education and Training

City of Mississauga

COSTI Immigrant Services

Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

Family Services of Peel

India Rainbow Community Services of Peel

Malton Library

Malton Women Council

Newcomer Information Centre

Peel District School Board Welcome Centre

Peel Multicultural Council

Peel Newcomer Strategy Group

Punjabi Community Health Services

Rotary Club of Mississauga - Airport

Sheridan College

Social Planning Council of Peel

Volunteer MBC

The Community Foundation of Mississauga is grateful for the generous contributions of all participants.

Key Findings

Influences

During the forum, many pressing challenges facing newcomers were identified. So many of these barriers are not a surprise to those familiar with the settlement sector... employment, language, awareness of available resources. In their search for employment in Canada, newcomers may need training or assistance in compiling a resume or may have accreditation from a home country that is not recognized in Canada. There can be inadequate comprehension of English, whether reading, writing or speaking, which significantly complicates everyday life, including accessing programs and services. Securing affordable childcare and transportation can be obstacles as well. Lack of understanding of the roles of police, government agencies, and healthcare can be trouble spots as well.

Another influence in this sector is the current settlement of Syrian refugees. The shortage of Arabic speaking staff was specifically named, as well as a lack of basic supports, such as blankets and childcare. A common theme was the mandate to support all newcomers, including Syrian refugees, yet public focus may be narrowed to this one segment of settlement work.

Many in attendance also vocalized the vulnerability of many of the newcomers with whom they work. This is particularly true with regard to employment, be it unpaid internships, insufficient compensation and benefits, or any other way newcomers are exploited. So often, victims do not feel comfortable reporting unfair employment situations for fear of retaliation. There is also the need for increased awareness of labour rights.

An additional topic was managing the expectations of newcomers. Some newcomers carry expectations that, despite everyone's best efforts, are simply not achievable given the resources at hand. Refugees and newcomers need to be prepared for profound culture shock. Service providers bear the responsibility of helping newcomers make the necessary adjustments to Canadian life, including managing expectations. Assistance with this "cultural shift" can include offering financial literacy workshops with a specific focus on costs in Canada, especially housing and heating. This might also involve parenting in Canada and the social expectations of children in a Canadian context.

Another theme to the forum was the need for service providers to be aware of how the settlement needs of newcomers change with age. Adults sometimes struggle to retain their culture, dealing with loss of identity and possibly facing accreditation issues which can have mental health impacts. Seniors might feel a loss of self-worth and face health issues. Those who are older may struggle finding work. A senior could become more isolated with the weather, not used to temperatures in Canada. They also lack social networks to combat feelings of isolation.

Children take priority from point of view of parents, with parents understandably making sacrifices at their own expense. Interestingly, small children, despite coming from a difficult situation, seem to be less traumatized than older children. It is often easier for them to adapt and be resilient. For older youth, settlement can be complicated by their ability to remember a time free of the present challenges. They may miss their friends and be afraid of the unknown. Teenagers might be torn between two cultures, expected to uphold traditional cultural values while still keeping up with the trends of their peers.

Working together

Moving forward, those in attendance at the forum expressed the need to foster increased awareness of fellow service providers through sharing information and increasing communication. This might include creating a resource that lists all available services and programs. Also, communication between service providers might reveal any gaps that need addressing.

There was a desire as well to find additional ways to engage the broader community in the support of newcomers. Generally, this could mean asking people to help with specific events or initiatives. But more specifically, it could mean creating a newcomer welcome bus to take newcomers to recreation centres, libraries and other helpful places. With employment being a key newcomer goal, service providers also named employers as key partners in the settlement of newcomers. Employers were invited to recognize previous experience and training in newcomers' countries of origin. According to Peel Halton Local Employment Planning Council, internships, professional mentoring, and bridge training are all ways employers can help newcomers achieve their employment goals.

Opportunities were also named for philanthropic sector too. Many service providers in attendance expressed a desire to move past project funding and move instead to supporting outstanding organizations. Participants were open to initiatives that strengthen relationships, including relationships with funders, such as extending invitations to funders to attend their programs and experience firsthand the impact of their generosity at work. It also involves moving beyond quantitative data (although its importance was acknowledged), to demonstrating value and impact through storytelling. Do report forms allow space for the kind of narratives that capture the impact successful programs have on clients' lives? Also, given the collaborative partnerships throughout service providers to newcomers in Mississauga, the question was asked if an alternative to competitive funding exists.

Conclusions

What steps might we pursue to support the delivery of programs and services to newcomers in Mississauga?

- Continue the conversation about the need for supporting youth mental health among newcomers
- Support service providers who are currently challenged to respond to settlement of Syrian refugees alongside usual influx of newcomers to Mississauga
- Explore opportunities for further partnerships and deeper relationships

It is our hope that this report will affirm our individual and collective efforts to support newcomers in Mississauga. We'd love to hear from you!

Sources

Community Foundation of Mississauga: *Mississauga's Vital Signs*, 2015.

Peel Halton Local Employment Planning Council: *Newcomers & the Labour Market*, January 2016.

Statistics Canada: *2011 National Household Survey*.