The Power of Relationships

The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung once said, "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” There is no doubt that this holds true for newcomers in Waterloo Region, those working or connecting with them, or for the community as a whole.

During community outreach for the development of our forthcoming community action plan, immigrants and refugees told Immigration Partnership that their lack of local relationships and feelings of isolation rank among their biggest challenges. Community agencies told us that lack of knowledge of and direct relationship development with services across sectors limited their ability to fully support newcomer clients. Newcomers and community agencies alike reported that their biggest successes stemmed from strong relationships.

This latest issue of our Newsletter highlights some of the many ways relationships are started, nurtured and flourish. Profiled initiatives illustrate the power and impact of positive relationships on newcomer settlement and inclusion, service success, personal growth and community development. IamWaterlooRegion ambassador stories demonstrate the reciprocal contribution many newcomers make to this community through new relationships and involvements. This Newsletter also includes information about the people involved with the Immigration Partnership and work being done by our partners.

We hope you enjoy this Newsletter and are inspired to build your own relationships to support the community integration of immigrants, refugees and other people in Waterloo Region.

Tara Bedard
Manager, Immigration Partnership
Relationships That Cultivate Newcomer Inclusion

Local Landlords Welcome Refugees

Who knew that relationships could be built with tea kettles and curtains? This is what Becky and Jim Dorscht learned after renting an apartment to an elderly refugee couple from Syria in early 2016. Becky and Jim became more than just landlords and found it was little efforts that made so much of a difference to their new tenants.

Becky and Jim worked with the couple’s private sponsorship group to move them into the unit and used their own truck to pick up furniture that the sponsorship group could not move. Becky sat down to have coffee with the couple and taught them to use their tea kettle. When the couple needed curtains for one window, she brought a set and hung them up. From looking out for them to teaching them about garbage day and using green garbage bags, the relationship with the Dorschts has been critical to helping this couple from Syria settle in Canada. Becky and Jim reflect: “We put ourselves in their shoes and hope that we would be treated the same way if we had to flee our country. Refugees are people just like you and I.”

In the last year, Waterloo Region has resettled and welcomed over 1,700 Syrian refugees fleeing civil unrest and persecution. Finding affordable housing is one of the most important first steps for immigrants and refugees settling in Waterloo Region. It can be very difficult for people who speak little to no English, have limited income, do not have rental history or guarantors or who don’t have the relationships and connections to find housing.

While housing can be a significant challenge, many amazing landlords have helped to welcome and support refugee families establishing their new life here.

The Waterloo Region Landlords Welcome Refugees Award recognized eight local landlords who went above and beyond to provide affordable housing solutions for refugees in the last year. It was presented at the November 17, 2016 National Housing Day Celebration at Regional Council Chambers.

Read the inspiring stories of how each landlord provided innovative, flexible and caring housing solutions for refugees at www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca and contact Immigration Partnership if you are interested in providing housing solutions for refugees and other newcomers in Waterloo Region.

Winners of the 2016 Waterloo Region Landlords Welcome Refugees Award
• Aliu Kamara
• Carole Kozlowski
• Debbie and Jim Rae
• Dr. David Wolkoff
• Gerald and Pam Schaus
• Janet Brown
• Jim and Becky Dorscht
• Robert Vermette
Private Sponsorship – The Path to Many New and Lasting Relationships!

Wendy Adema, Mennonite Central Committee and Rob Donelson, VP, Development and Alumni Relations at Wilfrid Laurier University and Chair of Laurier’s Syrian Refugee Response Committee

When the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi washed ashore on a beach in Turkey, a collective gasp fell over much of the world. Like many others across Canada, people at Wilfrid Laurier University were moved by these images and responded quickly. A new relationship was formed when Laurier reached out to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) which, as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, agreed to partner to sponsor three refugee families in Kitchener/Waterloo and Brantford.

A call for volunteers from across campus was immediately sent out and a plan developed. Nearly 100 faculty, staff and students stepped up to help. Fortunately they included several Arabic-speaking volunteers. Over $90,000 was raised in just a few weeks and many staff and faculty donated furniture or other household items to fully equip three apartments. New relations across campuses, departments and other institutional divides were developed and strengthened to mobilize around a community need.

The photo captures a momentous experience in the life of the Affan family whom the Laurier group first met at a hotel outside the Toronto airport. There, volunteers were ready with car seats and welcoming gifts to greet the family.

Several volunteers have worked closely with the Affans to register the children in school and to enroll the adults in English classes. Volunteers made sure that all necessary medical appointments were made. Volunteers also introduced the family to local shopping areas and many visited regularly to welcome them and assist in their transition in Canada.

One of the greatest outcomes of Laurier's sponsorship has been the one-to-one relationships between the volunteers and the newcomer families. They have truly come to know each other and real bonds of friendship have been created that will outlast the formal year-long sponsorship obligation. Whether it was the person who took them to a dentist appointment, who worked out the family budget or who helped shop for clothing or groceries, the differences seem insignificant in comparison to what they have in common.

The strength of these new relationships are helping the newcomers bridge into a new society. The Affan family is adjusting well to Canadian life. The kids are enjoying school and the family has come to know their community well. Local organizations such as the YMCA, The Working Centre and ShamRose have all been important partners in various aspects of resettlement.

For more information about private refugee sponsorship contact: wendyadema@mcco.ca.
Building a relationship with their community is very important for the long-term settlement of newcomers. Whether it is through accessing municipal government services, volunteering or voting, this can be an important path to belonging for newcomers.

The Immigration Partnership’s Belong Steering Group saw a void to be filled in 2014 with first-time voters and the upcoming municipal election. Partners envisioned Waterloo Region as an inclusive community that included immigrants participating in civic affairs. They wanted to see increasing immigrant awareness of the services provided by municipal and regional government through a series of information sessions.

For most community residents, municipal government is the most accessible level of government. Municipal government impacts many vital services and programs including: bus service and transit; roads; water and utilities; recreation; garbage pick-up; police, fire and ambulance services; public health; social assistance; children’s and senior services; and social housing. Municipal elections are held every four years and all adult Canadian citizens can cast a vote for candidates running in the election. It is the elected officials in the cities, townships and at the Regional level that make decisions about how local tax dollars are spent and what services and programs should be available.

A Municipal Services Action Group began to host presentations to promote local democracy and civic engagement in 2014. Initial sessions were focused on educating newcomers on how their community works and ways to get involved.

After the 2014 municipal election, the Group began to work closely with St. Louis Adult Learning Centre and Conestoga College to make presentations about municipal government. The presentations were shared with English as a Second Language (ESL) and Language Instruction for Newcomer (LINC) classes. As of December 2016, they have reached over 400 students at St. Louis Adult Education and Conestoga College campuses.

The presentations share information about: Your Community and Government; How You Can Get Involved; Get to Know Your Local Government; and Building Belonging Together. The presentations are followed by question and answer sessions. Participants have the opportunity to interact with elected officials and municipal staff on issues that affect them.

This has been a very collaborative initiative with representatives from Immigration Partnership, Region of Waterloo, City of Cambridge, City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo, YMCA of Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo, Volunteer Action Centre and Reception House. Demand for the presentations continues to grow as they have proven to be a great opportunity to build relationships between newcomers and their community.
Leveraging Relationships for Employment

Carol Simpson, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

The Workforce Planning Board’s main role is to work with our local communities to identify and implement solutions to local labour market needs and issues, but we can’t do that alone.

We are a neutral collector and distributor of local labour market information. Our network has to be large enough to provide access to employers from across all sectors of industry and to connect to key stakeholders from other sectors like education, community agencies, economic development and government. Developing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders from all across the community is key to our work. One of the benefits of having these strong relationships is that it often enables us to directly connect individuals or organizations which can benefit from meeting each other.

In today’s labour market, being able to network and build relationships can really help someone find a job. This is particularly true for newcomers. Networking events and mentorship initiatives have provided countless newcomers in Waterloo Region with potential employment opportunities that might not have been possible without them. The Workforce Planning Board is very proud to work with partners like Immigration Partnership and to be able to leverage our strong community relationships to help in a variety of ways to connect industry, newcomers and other job-seekers.
I am Waterloo Region

#IamWaterlooRegion is a celebration of the rich diversity of Waterloo Region. This public education and awareness campaign showcases people who have moved here from other countries around the world.

Chattar Ahuja

Chattar Ahuja was born in India and later lived in Basingstoke, England. He came to Canada in 1975 and now lives in Woolwich Township with his family. Chattar studied in England and started his own manufacturing company in Canada in 1988. Volunteering is important to Chattar. He volunteers with the Golden Triangle Sikh Association and local justice organizations, and has participated in Terry Fox Runs for 35 years raising more than $100,000. “I feel very fortunate because I have been in a position to help others – and to receive help.” Chattar finds the Waterloo Region community to be very welcoming. He recalls only one difficult experience in Canada which led to an opportunity to build relationships: A group of young men surrounded him and yelled “Paki, go home.” He stood his ground in peace. A few days later one of the young men apologized and they spoke about the importance of getting to know one another.

I am Chattar Ahuja.
I am Waterloo Region.

Rev Dr Florence Juma

Rev Dr Florence Akumu Juma came to Canada in 1998 with her family, after having lived and studied in Kenya and South Africa where she earned a Masters in Divinity and a PhD in Historical Theology. In Canada, she completed a Masters in Education and Post Graduate Diploma in Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy. She is an ordained minister, an Associate Professional Faculty member at the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and a spiritual care provider at Grand River Hospital. Florence is an active volunteer with numerous organizations including the House of Friendship, the African Women’s Alliance and more. A mother and grandmother, she is also the author of three memoirs and two children’s books. Reflecting on her journey to Waterloo Region she states, “I have felt welcomed, both by my faith community and social and professional networks. I think it is part of the Canadian culture, welcoming people and helping them to belong.”

I am Florence Juma.
I am Waterloo Region.
Yan Li

In 2002, Yan Li and her husband travelled over 5,000 miles from southwest China to Canada with four bags full of memories and dreams for a new life. Her husband had found IT work in Waterloo Region. Yan dove into English classes because although she had studied English in China, she realized Canadians spoke differently and used different phrasing. Settling in Kitchener, she started taking employment preparation programs and by 2008 she was working in banking. To give back, she became a mentor for newcomers at the YMCA and became very active with the local Chinese community. Yan also hosts a Mandarin-language radio program on 98.5 CKWR. She now works as a real estate agent helping many people establish a home here. Speaking about Waterloo Region, Yan states, “There are so many good things here and I am proud to be a resident. There are opportunities and this is a good, safe place to work, live and raise your family. […] I am from China but now I am from Waterloo Region.”

I am Yan Li.
I am Waterloo Region.

Dr Ernest Osei

Ernest Osei was born in Ghana and first came to Canada in 1989 to study at McMaster University. After completing a PhD in England he then returned to Canada with his wife and three children in 2000. A resident of Kitchener, Ernest now heads the Medical Physics Department at Grand River Hospital where he tests treatment for cancer patients. He is a Professor at the University of Waterloo and actively provides co-op students with learning opportunities in Medical Physics. Dr Osei gives back to the Waterloo Region community through volunteer work at the Centreville Chicopee Community Association. He believes that diversity is increasing in Kitchener and notes that his family has definitely experienced welcome and belonging since their arrival - at work, school and in their neighbourhood. “Our neighbours are great. When it snows whoever arrives first starts to shovel. We look out for each other.”

I am Ernest Osei.
I am Waterloo Region.
Newcomer Programs in Waterloo Region

Family Partnership Program

*Cassandra Bangay, Reception House Waterloo Region*

The Family Partnership Program at Reception House connects newcomer families with local families and volunteers. Reception House supports these connections by facilitating matches and providing volunteers with orientation. Reception House also provides complementary tickets to local events so that newcomers can participate in fun activities without financial barriers. So far, 227 newcomers have been paired with 168 volunteers through 40 matches.

Staff have witnessed the great impact the program has had on the lives of the newcomers involved. Case Manager Layla Jabbour says, “The Family Partnership Program provides an opportunity for our clients to meet fluent English speakers and have one-on-one conversations, which is an incredible gift when you are learning a new language. It encourages them to start making friends in their new community. These relationships are the foundation of a successful settlement process.”

Reception House matched the Al Nhitt family with a program volunteer in August 2016. They became friends while the family was living in temporary accommodation last winter and continued to connect after they moved to their new home in Waterloo. “Visits with the family are the best part of my week,” says volunteer Rachel Clements. “My relationship with them is reciprocal. I feel at home when I am with them.” The Al Nhitts could not agree more: “Rachel always supports us. We really appreciate having her in our life. She is family to us. It feels like she is the light we have in Canada.”

Together, they have gone on trips to Toronto and St Jacob’s market, celebrated birthdays and are currently planning a party to celebrate the birth of the family’s seventh child.

To get involved contact Cassandra: cassandra@kwrcentre.ca or 519-588-3399.

YMCA Host Program

*Lydia Awuah-Mensah & Katherine Peterson, YMCA*

The YMCA Host Program was introduced in June 2016 to offer social support and friendship to Syrian newcomers as they settle into their new communities. So far 20 families with 100 members have been matched with dedicated community volunteers.

Different forms of matches have been created: one volunteer to a family; family-family relationships; couple-couple relationships; and others. Matching is ongoing as more volunteers continue to express interest in the program. The matches created are going very well and newcomer families are very appreciative of the support they are receiving. Here are some experiences that have been shared so far.

> “Things are going well! We saw our family again last night and had them over for board games. The language barrier is getting easier to manage and they’re awesome people. We are going to help them navigate the bus system when they move because their new address is more central and I think it will be much easier.” – HOST Volunteer

> “We had our first meeting last Wednesday and I really enjoyed spending time with the family. They fed me and gave me Arabic coffee. They showed me some videos from Syria and tried to explain different things about the videos to me. The mother said I would be like a daughter to her. We decorated gingerbread cookies, which they all enjoyed. We also went grocery shopping together and that was fun.” – HOST Volunteer
Immigration Partnership People

Dianne Boston-Nyp, Belong Steering Group Vice Chair

Dianne Boston-Nyp is in the role of community engagement with the Volunteer Action Centre of KW and Area.

Dianne was a “newcomer” to Waterloo Region from Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1984. After graduating from Brock University with a theatre arts degree she spent 20 years working with the Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region. As a Public Education Program Coordinator she worked to dispel myths and raise awareness about people with disabilities.

It was in 2007 that she joined the Volunteer Action Centre of KW and Area (VAC): “I enjoy the opportunity to connect with a variety of networks, organizations, institutions and individuals who are searching for ways to connect for a shared benefit to all.” The VAC offers an online resource and professional development programs. They help organizations and individuals connect to volunteer opportunities in over 150 local programs and provide “volunteer readiness” concepts to youth, newcomers, people with disabilities and corporate sector employees who want to become involved in volunteerism.

Dianne sees how clearly “community involvement directly impacts belonging and can increase skills for employment.” This is why she participates in Immigration Partnership’s Belong Steering Group, of which she recently became Vice Chair, and its Immigrant Employment Action Group. As a VAC representative, she wants to bring awareness and information about volunteer opportunities to those who need them.

She enjoys the privilege of connecting newcomers and others to local charities through volunteerism – in particular those who may have barriers to involvement or access to information. Working alongside the Immigration Partnership network is a great opportunity for the Volunteer Action Centre to create a more connected community through beneficial networking and learning opportunities.

Tina Allishaw, Member, Work Steering Group and Immigrant Employment Action Group

Tina Allishaw is the Manager of Community Partnerships and College Collaboration at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, where she has worked for 10 years.

She leads a new initiative that includes F.A.S.T. programs (Flexible, Accessible, Short Training), which are designed to help individuals gain new skills that are recognized by employers in 52 weeks or less. She also coordinates Conestoga services that support newcomers, including the Immigrant Internship Program. This program works collaboratively with the local Employment Ontario Employment Service Providers to support foreign trained professionals to find a job in their field.

Earlier, she worked as a Career Work Coach with Conestoga College’s Employment Ontario Employment Services Department and in recruitment at the Co-operative Education Program. Before working at Conestoga, Tina worked at Lutherwood in a variety of roles supporting job-seekers.

Relationship building has been critical to her career. “Relationship building helped me in my professional endeavors both on the job and in my career,” she recalls. She points out how central relationships are to so much of her work - with clients, students,
The ability to effectively network and build new relationships provided new opportunities for growth, innovation and positive partnerships.

“...help me to provide strong customer service, gain a better understanding of community needs, learn about new resources and implement solution-focused strategies.”

**Immigration Partnership Updates**

**Settle**

The Settle Steering Group (SSG) has been engaging in conversations about how to have impact over the next three years. Getting the needs and opportunities for immigrants and refugees on the radar of key sectors like housing, health or mental health is critical. Educating service providers, consistent English language interpretation and expanding English learning opportunities are also important. Another surge of refugees from Syria and other countries settled in Waterloo Region at the end of 2016 and many SSG partners are involved in supporting those individuals. Through participation in the Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition, Immigration Partnership contributed to a petition for better dental health coverage for low-income families, which was presented to local MPPs in December 2016. The SSG also awarded the new Landlords Welcome Refugees Award to eight landlords in November 2016, recognizing local landlords that went above and beyond to provide affordable housing solutions for recent refugees.

**Work**

The Work Steering Group (WSG) is off to the races in 2017, starting with participation in the Communitech Tech Jam in January and the Employer Recognition Award event hosted by Community Employment Literacy Committee (CELC) in February. WSG engaged new employers and promoted programs at the Chamber’s Business After 5 event in February, together with partners Immigrant Internship Program (Conestoga College), Immigrant Mentorship Program (YMCA) and Newcomer Pre-Employment Program (K-W Multicultural Centre). Plans are underway for the 9th Global Skills Conference for which Immigration Partnership is part of the Steering Committee and leading the annual networking event.

**Belong**

The Belong Steering Group (BSG) has been busy in the past months rolling out the #IamWaterlooRegion campaign, releasing new ambassadors’ posters and stories monthly on the third Thursday. Its Municipal Services Action Group delivered several local democracy and civic engagement presentations to ESL learners and is reaching out to other newcomer groups. On National Flag Day, the BSG hosted a Community Citizenship Ceremony at Kitchener City Hall where Canada’s newest citizens were welcomed. The Ceremony was held in collaboration with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship and many members of the BSG were directly involved in its organization. Thank you to the City of Kitchener and everyone who joined us to celebrate with the new citizens. The BSG also welcomed Paulina Cisneros from the K-W Multicultural Centre as one of its members.
Community Events and Updates

Global Skills Conference 2017

The 9th Annual Global Skills Conference is an opportunity for Internationally Trained Professionals to be inspired and learn tips to gain employment in Canada. The conference ends with a networking event hosted by Immigration Partnership. For more information visit: www.globalskillsconference.com.

When: Wednesday, April 12, 8:30 am-4:30 pm
Where: Holiday Inn, Kitchener

Coalition of Muslim Women of KW Awards Gala Dinner

The gala dinner will honour women who inspire, with live entertainment and “the best multicultural feast in town.” Purchase tickets at: https://cmwawardsdinner.eventbrite.ca.

When: Saturday, March 18, 6:00-9:00 pm
Where: The Family Centre, 65 Hanson Avenue, Kitchener

Volunteer Action Centre

Volunteer Impact Awards 2017

The Volunteer Impact Awards recognize volunteers from Waterloo Region who demonstrate outstanding contributions in areas of youth, individuals, groups and leadership. Nominations are due March 5, 2017. Contact Dianne Boston-Nyp at: dianne@volunteerkw.ca or visit www.volunteerkw.ca for the online application.

When: Thursday, April 27, 6:00-9:00 pm
Where: Waterloo Region Museum, 10 Huron Road, Kitchener

National Volunteer Week (April 23 to 29)

National Volunteer Week is an opportunity to promote volunteerism and celebrate volunteers. Check www.volunteerkw.ca for more information about the Ontario Youth Volunteer “ChangetheWorld” Challenge and other events and opportunities.

Idea Exchange Library Programs

Settlement Worker for Those New to Canada

Our settlement worker helps newcomers learn about Canadian culture, schools, health care and more. No appointment needed. Call or email for more information at 519-621-1621 x271 or ssachdev@ckwymca.ca.

When: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am-5:30 pm
Where: Idea Exchange, Queen’s Square, 1 North Square, Cambridge

English Conversation Circles

Practice English conversation skills and discuss a variety of topics with others who are new to Canada in this free, drop-in program for adults. For more information, call 519-621-0460.

Tuesdays: 6:15-8:15 pm, Clemens Mills 50 Saginaw Parkway, Cambridge

Wednesdays: 6:15-8:15 pm, Queen’s Square 1 North Square, Cambridge

Thursdays: 6:15-8:15 pm, Preston 435 King Street East, Cambridge

Fridays: 1:00-3:00 pm, Hespeler 5 Tannery Street East, Cambridge

March Break Activities (March 11-19)

Kids are invited to come have fun with many free unique activities this March Break. We have special performances, art projects, technology programs and more at all Idea Exchange library locations.

Where: Queen’s Square, 1 North Square, Cambridge, 519-621-0460

Preston, 435 King Street East, Cambridge, 519-653-3632

Hespeler, 5 Tannery Street East, Cambridge, 519-658-4412

Clemens Mill, 50 Saginaw Parkway, Cambridge, 519-740-6294

Design at Riverside, 7 Melville Street South, Cambridge, 519-621-0460
National Youth Arts Week (May 1-7)
Cambridge youth are invited to join this national celebration showcasing the talents of young people. Enjoy a week of fun activities and meet new friends! See the full schedule at ideaexchange.org/nyaw.

Kitchener Public Library Programs

**English Conversation Circles**
Practice your English skills while we talk, listen, learn and laugh about life in Canada. This free drop-in program is a great way to improve your English speaking skills and meet new people. No registration required.

- Mondays: 1:00 pm, Central Library 85 Queen Street North, Kitchener
- Wednesdays: 7:00 pm, Grand River Stanley Park Library 175 Indian Road
- Thursdays: 10:00 am, Central Library 85 Queen Street North, Kitchener (women only)
- Saturdays: 9:30 am, Forest Heights Library 251 Fischer-Hallman Road

**Better Prepare with Road to IELTS**
This 2-hour British Council IELTS information session will help you become familiar with the IELTS test and introduce you to a variety of free preparation resources. Staff from St. Louis Adult Learning Centre, Coordinated Language Assessment Referral Services and Kitchener Public Library will share resources to help you prepare for IELTS. Registration is required at www.kpl.org or call 519-743-7502.

When: Monday, March 6, 6:30 pm
Where: Central Library, 85 Queen Street North, Kitchener

**Teen Programs**
The library offers a wide variety of free programs for teens: Computer workshops, creative writing classes, art activities and more. Discover programs at www.kpl.org/teens.

Waterloo Public Library Programs

**English Conversation Circles**
English language learners are welcome to join us in a conversation circle to improve their language fluency. This program is run in partnership with YMCA Immigrant Services. For more information email Katherine at kpeterson@ckwymca.ca or call 519-579-9622.

When: Wednesdays, 6:30-8:30 pm
Where: McCormick Branch, 500 Parkside Drive

**Financial Sessions for 55+**
Join us for a discussion on Old Age Security (OAS), Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), provincial benefits, employment programs and community resources for people planning for retirement. These sessions will be offered in a variety of languages (Arabic, Mandarin, Farsi and Dari). Visit www.wpl.ca for information about dates and locations or ask your settlement worker about our new series of financial workshops for adults 55 years of age or older.

**Arabic Family Storytime**
Join us for songs, stories, games and so much fun – in Arabic! Everyone is welcome for this drop-in program. No registration required.

When: Thursday, March 16, 2:00-3:00 pm
Where: Main Library, 35 Albert Street

**March Break Activities (March 13-17)**
Check out all the fun March Break activities in the WPL Children’s Program Guide - Winter 2017 at www.wpl.ca.