



**Newcomers
Conversation Cafés
Report
2012**

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1.0 Background and Summary

During 2012, Leadership Waterloo Region Alumni partnered with the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership to develop and implement a Newcomers Conversation Café series. The purpose of the series was to provide an opportunity for community input to the action planning process of the Immigration Partnership. Through panel presentations and round-table discussions, data and ideas were gathered under the Immigration Partnership pillar areas of focus: Settle, Work and Belong.

The series provided an opportunity for immigrants to share stories of their experience of immigrating and settling in Waterloo Region. As well, it enabled service providers and other stakeholders in the Immigration Partnership to share their perspective, stories and support, thus allowing mutual learning and understanding to occur among all participants. Participants were able to identify the main areas of strength and challenges they encounter while immigrating and settling in our Region.

Settling

The first Conversation Café focusing on “Settling” was held on February 8, 2012 and attended by 75 individuals, from 23 different countries of origin. Participants discussed what services in the community have been helpful to their settlement and what needs to be improved to make the settling experience less challenging.

Immigrants voiced the pressing need to have a “one-stop-shop” that provides a variety of practical settlement information. Mentorship, training, and work placement programs are among the most identified services needed as finding suitable employment is a primary settlement need for most newcomers. Other suggestions include better language training, housing, health care and understanding of Canadian culture.

Belonging

The second Conversation Café took place on May 23, 2012 which focused on how to better connect with and integrate newcomers into the community. The event was attended by 60 individuals from 23 different countries.

Participants had an in-depth discussion of the meanings of “acceptance”, “participating”, “valued”, and “integrated”. They discussed the importance of being accepted, participating in local activities, feeling valued and integrating in the community. It was agreed that belonging is a two-way process where Canadians and newcomers work together to create a more tolerant and understanding culture.

Working

The final Conversation Café in 2012 was held on October 24 with a focus on finding meaningful employment. The event was attended by approximately 43 participants, including 14 employer representatives.

Panel members of employers and immigrants offered their ideas and experience on inclusive hiring practices and strategies to take when looking for employment. We learnt that many employers in our Region offer inclusive and diverse strategies to support immigrants to gain employment. Some key messages for an immigrant looking for employment was to keep trying different strategies and the value of building your local network of peers and contacts through face-to-face interactions and social media.

What Next?

Leadership Waterloo Region Alumni led organization of these events along with data collation and reporting. Each pillar report was shared with all participants and members of the respective pillar groups: Settle, Work and Belong. Immigration Partnership stakeholders used the reports to identify ideas and initiatives they would focus on as part of their efforts to work in collaboration to better support immigrants.

This combined report provides the data gathered from all the Conversation Café's.

2.0 Settling Conversation Cafe

The focus for the first café of the series held on February 8, 2012 was 'Settling'. For the purpose of this conversation café, 'Settling' was defined as:

"Short-term transitional issues faced by newcomers as they arrive in Waterloo Region. This includes the enhancement of settlement services provided by settlement organizations as well as mainstream organizations."

Two discussion questions were presented to the participants. Each question was discussed for a period of twenty minutes. Scribes were on hand at each table to capture the essence of the discussions. The scribe notes were used to form the basis of this report.

2.1 Demographics

A survey was provided for participants to complete with the intention of identifying the demographics of those who chose to attend. Among 123 participants, 38 (31%) participants completed the survey.

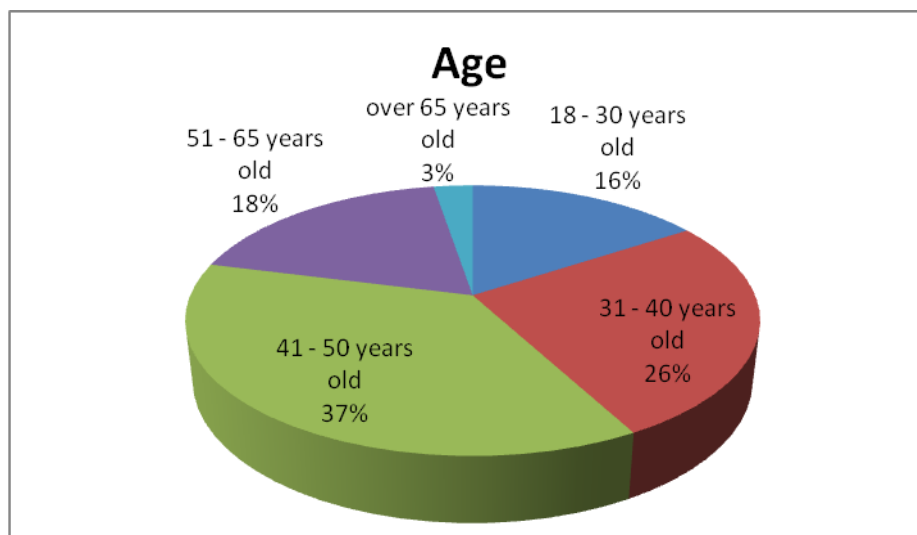
Demographic statistics are:

Gender

Total 38 answers: Male 7 (18%), female 31 (82%)

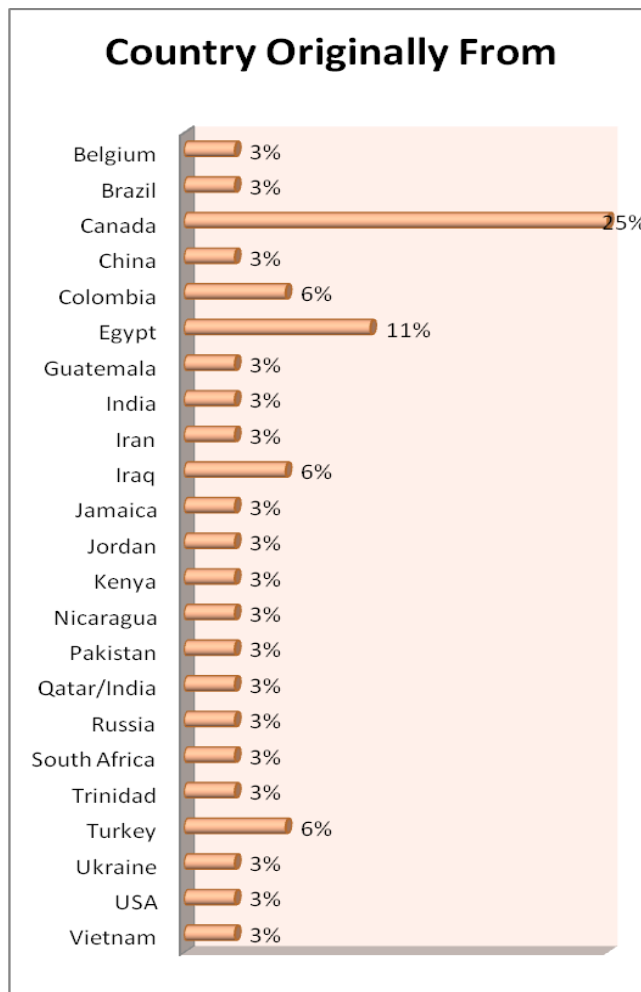
Age

The majority were between 18 and 65 among the total 38 answers.



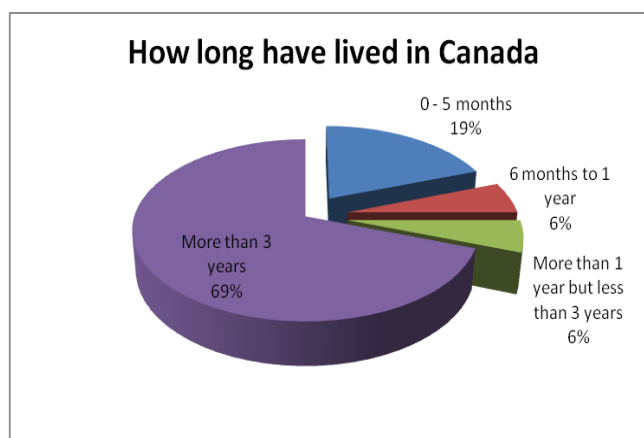
Original country

Among the total 37 answers, 23 different countries were represented.

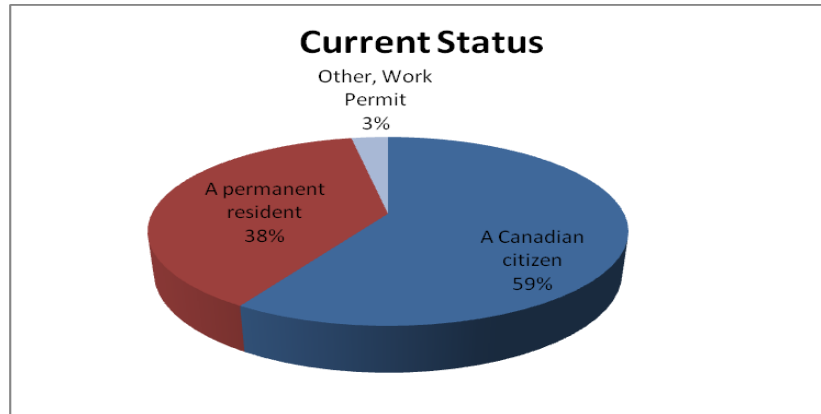


How long have you lived in Canada?

Length of time in Canada: 9 less than 1 year, majority in Canada 3 years or more among the total 36 answers.



Please tell us you current Status:



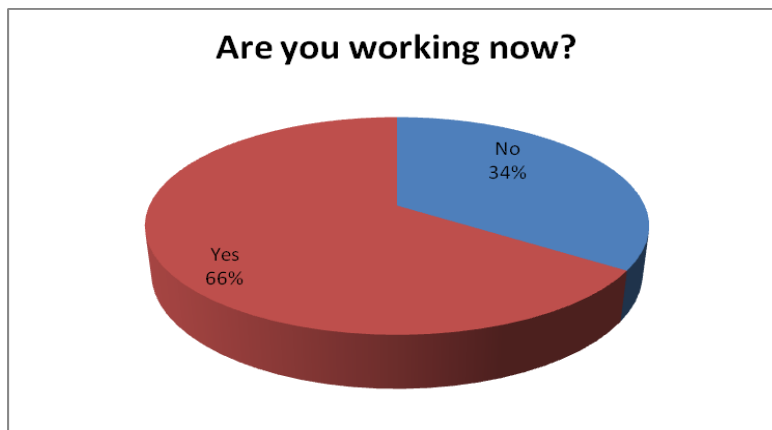
Are you studying now?

Total 32 answers: Yes, 13 (41%), No 19 (59%)

If yes, what are you studying:

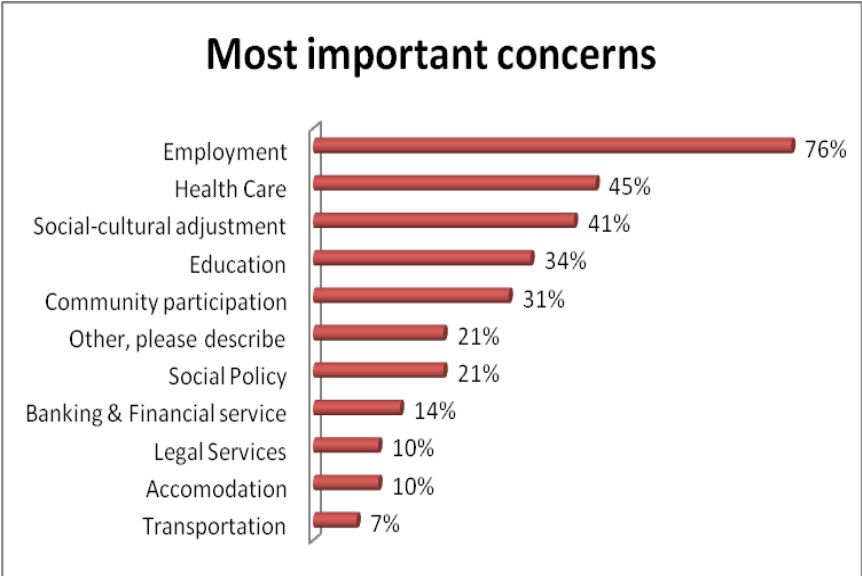
- Studied Hr & Adult Education when I arrived
- ESL, English
- Applied organization & leadership development at Conestoga college
- Job Development Professional program at Conestoga
- Women and gender studies / political sci.
- I'm studying English at St Francis
- Qualification my degree
- Part time - job development practitioner
- Master's degree in pharmacy, UW
- CHRP (HR Designation)

Are you working now?



What are your most important concerns regarding your settlement in Canada?

Total 29 answers



2.2 Discussion Results

The following two questions were asked at the ‘Settling’ conversation café:

- 1. Moving into a new community (or country) is challenging. What are the most important things that communities can provide to help newcomers settle?
- 2. In your experience, what was helpful during your settlement in Waterloo Region? What could be improved in Waterloo Region to help newcomers settle? If you do not have a direct experience of settling, try to put yourself in other’s shoes and imagine what would be helpful and what would be challenging.

Scribe notes were collected and summarized following the event. Several key themes emerged from the discussions. These themes are discussed below.

Services Available

The comment most frequently heard about services available to assist immigrants is that a ‘one-stop-shop’ is needed. There are many good services available to assist newcomers but they are not integrated. They are in different locations, formats and deal with different topics. It is difficult for newcomers to know where to go for information. We need to ensure that newcomers know about agencies that are available to help right from the start.

When they first arrive immigrants can experience ‘information overload’. They receive a lot of information from a lot of different places. There needs to be more co-ordination between the agencies that assist immigrants. Information provided on entry to the country is very general. It needs to be more practical and help with specifics to the area in which they are settling. Immigrants need to know labour laws, their rights before they sign contracts for rentals and purchases, where schools and housing are, where to purchase a variety of multicultural foods and how to bank amongst many other things. Support needs to be provided during various parts of their journey, not just as a first step.

Information needs to be provided in multiple languages and formats as newcomers do not always understand English when they arrive. The internet is a good source of information for newcomers who can read English.

Mentorship and befriending are great ways to provide support services to newcomers. Walking through the journey with someone who has been through it already is helpful. Newcomers take comfort in sharing the journey with someone who understands it.

There are different categories of immigrants. They have different 'stories' and varied reasons for coming to Canada. Some chose to come here. Others did not. Support services cannot assume all immigrants want to be here and cannot treat them all the same. Immigrants who choose to come to Canada may require different services from refugees who may not have chosen to immigrate.

Another comment that was heard more than once is that support agencies are dominated by 'white power'. Canadians or people of European descent often staff the support agencies. Newcomers can feel oppressed by 'white privilege' and struggle with accents. It would be a more comfortable experience for them if they could relate more to the people providing the support.

Participants identified these services as helpful:

- Preparation done in their home country prior to immigration;
- Volunteers with Immigration Canada came to their home and provided assistance;
- Welcome Wagon;
- Schools - they supported children and their families;
- Lutherwood and Mosaic are doing a good job of combining several services in one location.

Suggestions for improvements related to services available include:

- Encourage agencies to co-ordinate their services to provide more of a 'one-stop shop' experience;
- Information provided needs to be more practical and tied to the community they chose to settle in;
- Government support to provide affordable housing, student loans, childcare, and better employment opportunities and credentialing is needed to keep immigrants out of poverty;
- Provide settlement services that include obtaining a credit card, drivers licence, health card, Social Insurance number and child care arrangements before immigrants arrive in Canada;
- Have peer support workers available to support, mentor and befriend new immigrants;
- Improve and expand programs that currently work. Do not limit access based on immigration status or number of years in Canada;
- Educate Canadians so they are aware of the resources available to support newcomers.

Employment / Job Experience

Immigrants want to support their families, live productive lives and contribute to their communities but they are finding it difficult due to the challenge of finding good jobs. Finding suitable employment is a primary settlement need for most newcomers.

Some of the most difficult challenges newcomers face are around employment and job experience. Prior to immigrating, newcomers are told that the credentials they hold are in high

demand in Canada but when they arrive they learn that their foreign credentials are not accepted here. Lack of Canadian work experience is a major barrier to finding employment. Immigrants are finding that they need to accept any job just to gain work experience. They are working in jobs unrelated to their fields and far beneath the credentials they hold, many in retail stores, fast food restaurants and factories. Many educated newcomers are wasting their skills or returning to their home countries disillusioned. Immigrants are losing valuable time in their lives starting over.

There were a few things that participants identified as being helpful in relation to employment:

- Programs offered to help develop resumes and practice interview skills;
- Work placement program for new workers. Workers worked as volunteers for three months to gain experience;
- Access to computers in different centres assists with job searching and creation of resumes;
- Pathways to Education program offers mentoring and tutoring. It provided literacy support and transportation assistance.

Much change is needed in the area of employment for newcomers. These are some of the suggested areas of improvement:

- The first step may be to be more honest and open with them before they immigrate about the challenges they will face because their credentials will not be recognized in Canada.;
- Develop training programs to help develop strong resumes, and search for jobs. Programs should match their skills and educational back ground with suitable employment possibilities. Make computers available to them to assist with their job search;
- Foreign education, skills and credentials need to be more readily recognized in Canada. Recognize the value of the immigrants and the educational experience and skills they bring with them;
- Canadian employers need to be more open to hiring newcomers.

Language / Education

Language is another major barrier that many immigrants face when they come to Canada. Some have studied English in their home countries and can read and write English but they cannot speak it well. Others have no experience with English and struggle with even the simplest tasks. Knowing the English language is fundamental. Without a good grasp of the English language many immigrants are afraid to leave their homes.

English as a second language (ESL) classes are readily available but it is not always easy to figure out where to go. ESL teaches the basics but no English language support is provided after ESL. Immigrants identified that free language classes were helpful to assist newcomers with gaining English experience.

There were several suggestions brought forth for improving the Language support available:

- Embassies in other countries should inform potential immigrants of the language barrier they will face in Canada
- Move ESL classes into schools and community centres to make them more easily accessible
- Use technology (internet, CD's) to assist people with learning pronunciation
- Provide additional support after ESL classes are complete
- Increase the number of translators available

- Provide access to a guide/mentor who has been through the process and is willing to help others

Housing

Finding safe, adequate housing is another challenge faced by immigrants. Housing systems are different in Canada. Housing is expensive! Immigrants face challenges in finding good housing. They have no credit history and sometimes no jobs which makes renting housing difficult. Landlords are often distrusting, even when they can prove they have sufficient money in the bank. Immigrants may find themselves in unsafe, crowded housing that is not suitable for their families but they feel they have no other options.

Housing is a basic necessity. Better programs and assistance with finding safe, adequate housing are needed.

Health Care

Waterloo Region has three great hospitals. However there is a shortage of doctors. Many immigrants cannot get a family doctor in the region. Sadly, this issue is not unique to just immigrants.

Health care issues are difficult for immigrants to handle, especially with children. The language barrier makes it difficult to explain issues or understand diagnosis and treatment.

Credit History

Immigrants lose their credit history when they come to Canada. It is difficult for them to rent housing, get credit cards or even cell phones without any credit history. From a financial perspective, they have no past history once they arrive in Canada.

Emotional Challenges

Immigration is an emotionally difficult process. Newcomers often feel isolated, lonely and on their own. They often have no family or friends for support when they arrive, making the struggle even more difficult. Others who have not immigrated cannot relate to what the immigrants are going through.

Immigrants are often 'visible minorities', as a result they face racism, racial profiling and discrimination. Their social history has been erased and they find themselves starting over in a new country where everything is difficult. Immigrants often find themselves in embarrassing situations because they are not familiar with the English language and the Canadian culture. There was more than one person who reported eating cat food because they could not read the labels on the cans and thought it was tuna. Many also noted that they need to learn the practical things that are taken for granted daily by others like how to dress in winter, where to shop, how to have a Canadian birthday party.

Immigrants want to belong. They want to integrate and be productive members of society, not be assimilated. They want to be treated with acceptance and openness.

Suggestions for addressing the emotional challenges included:

- Provide sensitivity training for Canadians. Help them to become more aware of the issues immigrants face, more inclusive, accepting and less judgmental;
- Introduce programs to assist with rebuilding social history;
- Assist immigrants to become contributing members of society. Connect them with people who have been through the same process;
- Continue to have dialogues such as the conversation cafes to increase awareness.

Connecting

The journey is often made easier for immigrants who make the 'right' connections. Connections within the community can assist newcomers with language issues, cultural challenges and finding work. It is extremely helpful for immigrants to have a mentor who can help them through the process and guide them along their journey. It is even more helpful if the mentor is someone who has lived the immigration experience.

Several people commented on the great multiculturalism of the Waterloo Region. There are lots of new immigrants and established immigrants in the area. New and creative ways of making connections are needed to assist newcomers with settling. Newcomers want to belong and be able to give back to their community.

There were several suggestions identified for assisting with connecting. These suggestions included:

- Provide mentoring/befriending programs;
- Create a 'welcome package' from the community to identify social and cultural aspects
- Break down structural barriers to having a welcoming community (governing bodies and bureaucracy);
- Introduce Immigrant/Canadian coffee shop programs to provide intentional meeting places;
- Make organizations available to mentor youth and get them involved (sports groups, social functions);
- Identify potential volunteering opportunities that will assist in making connections;
- Provide opportunities for immigrants to meeting immigrants who have settled and become successful in the region. This helps increase hope that they can succeed as well;
- Provide gathering space outside of business hours that is affordable to immigrants for planned programs that have specific objectives;
- Help the global community build greater awareness of who newcomers are and the issues they face.

Canadian Culture

Canadian culture is difficult for newcomers to learn. There are many nuances that are not always known. Immigrants need assistance in knowing what is acceptable in Canada and what is not. Children are especially impacted by this issue. They find themselves getting in trouble here for doing something that was acceptable in their home country.

There needs to be a way to help newcomers learn the aspects of Canadian culture. They can easily get tripped up by things like rules of engagement in conversation – smile or not, eye contact or not, how to dress appropriately in various situations or table manners. There are many cultural differences that take time for newcomers to learn.

2.3 Points to Ponder

The points below were also made during the event but it was felt that they warrant individual mention as points to ponder.

- Immigrants want to belong. They want to integrate and be productive members of society, not be assimilated.

- By focusing on holding the hands of immigrants we can forget to hold them up and enable them.
- Newcomers' experiences are very different depending upon whether they have chosen to come here or if they are coming as refugees. The types of services they need may depend on how they arrived.
- The following paragraph was typed verbatim and provided by a participant who is both from another country and who has been involved in settlement of immigrants for over 20 years.

“I have been to events like this every year for the past 20 years and we're always asked the same questions and give the same answers. I think no one is really listening to us, but because it is the people with power and privilege who are asking, we have no choice but to attend and tell them again. I know the intention with each of these events is to make people feel included and valued, but the impact is quite the opposite.”

3.0 Belonging Conversation Cafe

The second café took place on May 23, 2012 with a focus on 'Belonging'. For the purpose of this conversation café, 'Belonging' was defined as:

“An essential human need to be accepted and valued by others to reach one’s full potential in connecting, participating, integrating and thriving within the life of the community.”

Four discussion questions were presented to the participants. Each table chose two questions to discuss for a period of twenty-five minutes per question. Scribes were on hand at each table to capture the essence of the discussions. The scribe notes were used to form the basis of this report.

3.1 Demographics

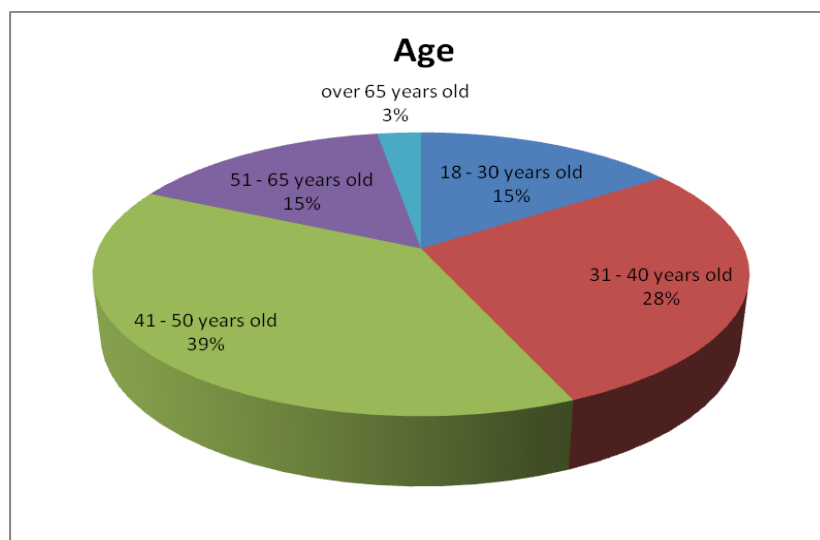
The event was attended by approximately 60 immigrants, newcomers and other community members. The evening was supported by 27 volunteers. A survey was provided for participants to complete with the intention of identifying the demographics of those who chose to attend. Forty-one participants completed the survey.

Gender

Total 37 answers (4 did not respond): Male 7 (19%), female 30 (81%)

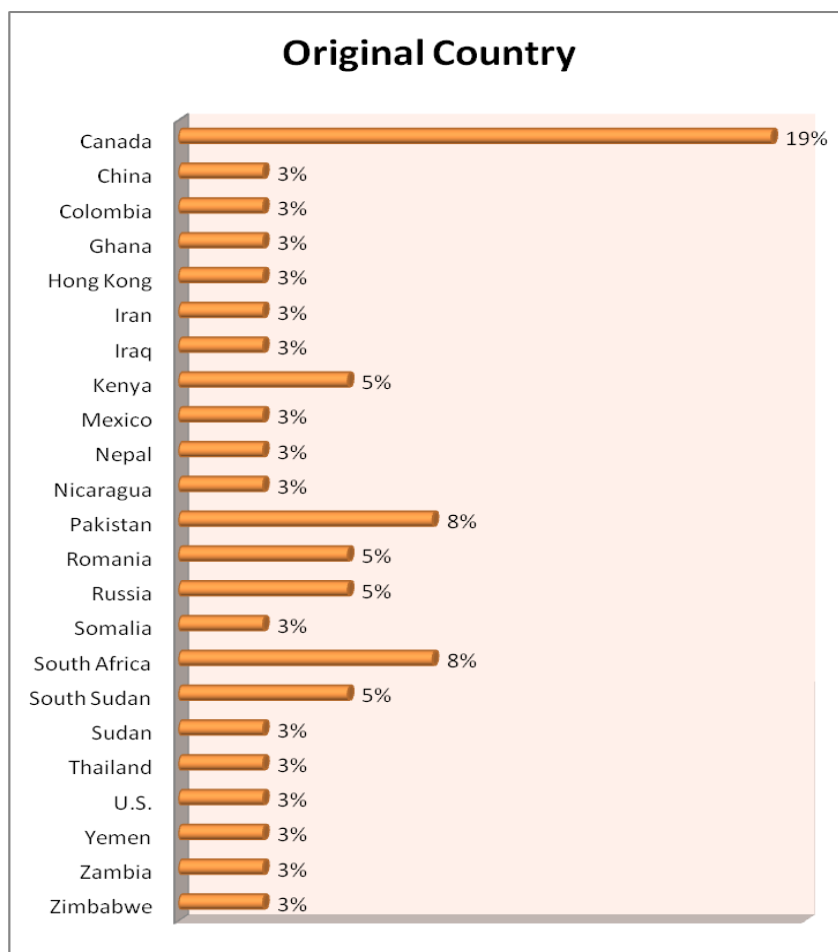
Age

Total 39 answers

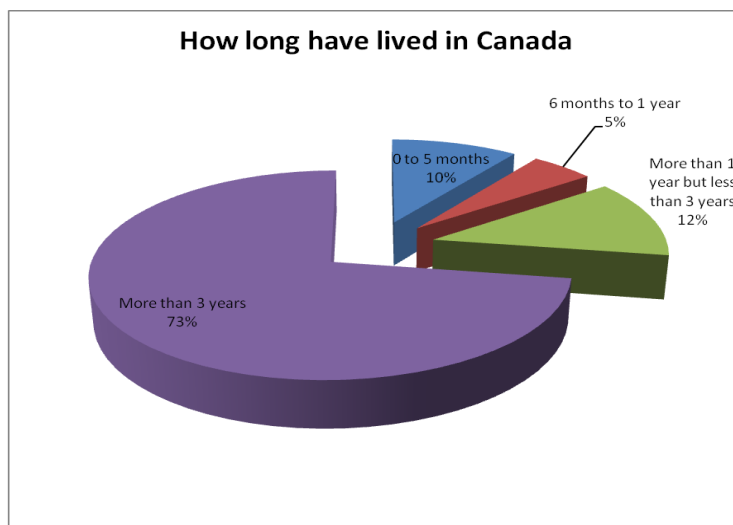


Original country

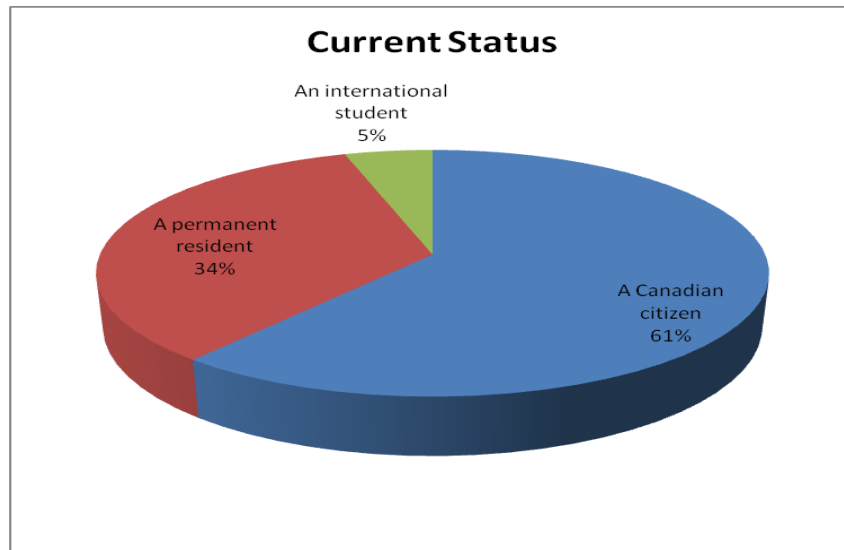
Total 37 answers, 23 different countries were represented



How long have you lived in Canada?

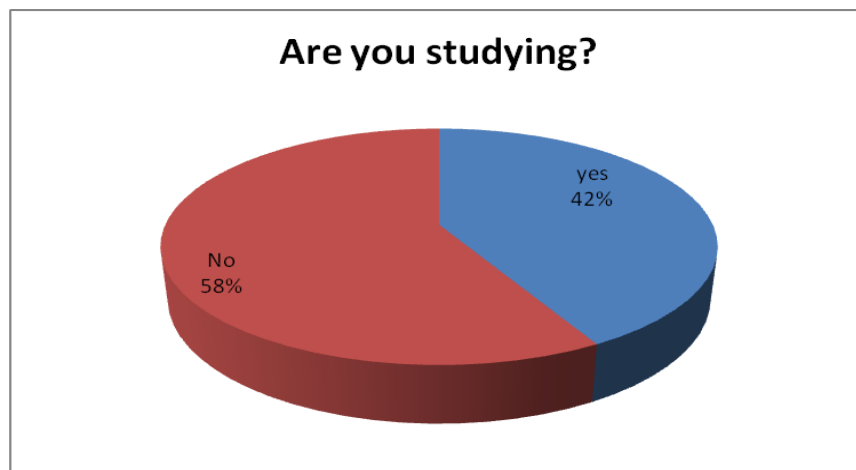


Please tell us your Current Status



Are you studying now?

Total 36 answers: Yes, 15 (42%), No 21 (58%)



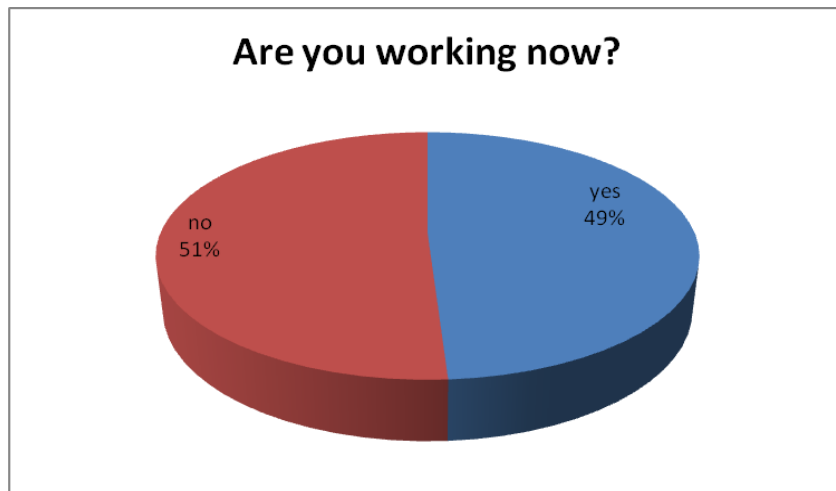
If yes, what are you studying?

- BSW university of Waterloo, Renison College
- ESL
- Grade 12
- industrial organizational psychology, PhD
- International woman & voice (Focus)
- IWV
- Master in software engineering

- Master of Engineering/ Degree
- Masters
- Masters in Civil Engineering
- MSW @ Laurier
- Religion Culture Major
- Taking continuing education courses part time
- U of Waterloo, environment & resource studies (major)

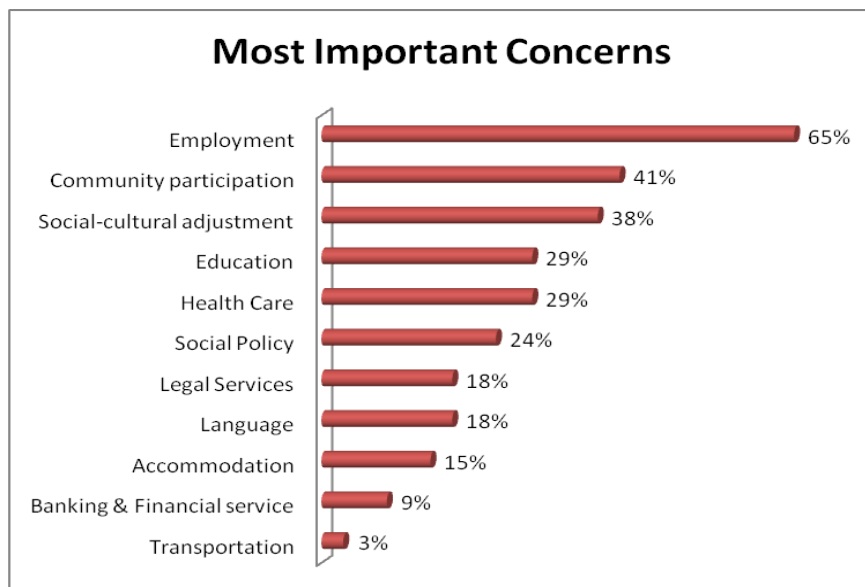
Are you working now?

Total 37 answers: yes 18 (49%), no 19 (51%)



What are your most important concerns regarding your settlement in Canada?

Total 34 answers,



3.2 Discussion Results

The following questions were discussed by the participants of the 'Belonging' conversation cafe.

1. When you hear the word "Acceptance"- What do you think this word means when thinking of Belonging in Waterloo Region?
2. When you hear the word "Participating" – What do you think this word means when thinking of Belonging in Waterloo Region?
3. When you hear the word "Valued" - What do you think this word means when thinking of Belonging in Waterloo Region?
4. When you hear the word "Integrated"- What do you think this word means when thinking of Belonging in Waterloo Region?

Several key themes emerged from the discussions related to each of the four questions. These themes are discussed below.

Acceptance

Acceptance is experienced differently by everyone. The most common comment made about 'Acceptance' throughout the evening is that Acceptance is a 'two-way street'. Acceptance must occur in both directions. The Canadian community must be willing to accept immigrants into their communities. Immigrants must be willing to accept a new way of life in Canada. Both must give and receive to build acceptance into the Canadian culture.

Many of the discussion participants felt that acceptance comes from believing in yourself. If you don't believe in yourself it is difficult to feel accepted. A large part of believing in yourself comes from feeling productive and having the ability to support your family and contribute to society in a meaningful way. Many immigrants who struggle to find employment or jobs similar to the careers they had in their countries of origin have difficulty feeling accepted in their new communities.

Acceptance is challenging because you have to be accepted in all areas of life, not just your work life. Acceptance is a feeling of welcome, as well as being given equal rights and treated with unconditional respect. Acceptance is feeling like you provide meaningful value to your community and in some cases it simply means being invited, included and welcomed. Acceptance is a sharing of cultures, ideas, food, humour and all other aspects of life. Acceptance is really feeling like you are an insider - that you belong and are a part of other people's lives. Acceptance needs to be permanent.

Acceptance involves accepting both the good and the bad. Oftentimes newcomers feel accepted until there is something in Canadian culture that they don't agree with. Once they speak out against the status quo they no longer feel welcome. Some have heard the phrase "if you don't like it, go home", or something similar.

Understanding is required to fully accept others. Canadians and Newcomers need to learn more about each other. They need to develop a relationship of mutual interest in the cultures of

each other before they can truly accept each other. We must appreciate and understand diversity in order to send a message of acceptance.

Many newcomers and children of newcomers have been inadvertently made to feel discriminated against by unwitting people who ask racist or stereotypical questions like 'Where are you from?' or 'is this your first winter here?'. The assumption is commonly made that since someone looks different they cannot be from this area; they must be from somewhere else. This is especially hurtful to immigrants who have become Canadian citizens and their children have been born in Canada. Newcomers may look different but they do not want to be treated differently on the basis of their appearance. There needs to be more sensitivity around culture and identity. Not everyone who 'looks' different is from outside of Canada. Conversely, not everyone who 'looks Canadian' is from Canada.

The diverse population in Canada can make it easier for newcomers to be accepted here. The Canadian culture is more open and accepting than the cultures many newcomers have come from. There are fewer restrictions around interracial marriage, freedom of speech, faith and other social issues. Newcomers find they have to learn and understand the boundaries in order to fit in and be accepted.

Despite the melting pot of culture available in Canada many newcomers still feel only 'tolerated' and not accepted. Some feel they will never belong here.

Another key aspect to being accepted is accepting yourself. Newcomers must accept themselves, their faith, culture and identity before they will truly feel accepted in their new home. They also must believe that they are accepted.

There also needs to be some understanding around the 'face' of immigrants. The 'face' of immigrants is changing. In the past most immigrants were poor and uneducated refugees who were often forced out of their countries. Today, more and more immigrants are educated and job-ready. They are skilled, knowledgeable and have valuable contributions to offer. All immigrants do not necessarily need to be provided the same types of assistance.

The feeling of being accepted can be empowering. This is evident for many student immigrants who feel accepted at their Canadian schools. They are empowered to get a good education and find it easier to fit in. Newcomers who feel that they are accepted feel that they are more willing to 'get out of the box' and try something different.

Acceptance in jobs is a huge factor for immigrants. In many cases educated immigrants find themselves having to become re-educated or working in a lesser job than what they did in their home country. Their credentials are not accepted in Canada.

Acceptance can sometimes be more difficult for youth and children. Several people commented that their children were readily accepted and welcomed into Canadian schools.

Extra-curricular activities can be another method of helping children feel accepted. However, some immigrant children do not get the opportunity to play because the activities are too

expensive. In some areas there are programs that assist newcomers by covering the fees so children can take part in extra-curricular activities.

Everyone brings a valuable perspective to the table. We must value diversity and promote it at every opportunity in order to create a platform of acceptance and belonging.

Participating

“Participate” is defined on dictionary.com as “to take or have part or share; as with others”. Participating can be done in a wide variety of ways – conversations, volunteering, working, attending events, going to different places, attending classes, playing sports, engaging in extra-curricular activities, just to name a few. Participate is an action word – people have to choose to actively engage and participate in order for it to be beneficial. The number of ways that people can participate is endless.

Participating is a great way for newcomers and Canadians to come alongside each other. Participating was also identified as the first step towards engaging with others, which may eventually lead to belonging. Opportunities to participate promote learning and help newcomers be part of the community. Participating often involves doing some type of task together which helps build connections and bring people together who have common interests.

Participating also opens doors in the community. Meeting other people and participating in things helps you to become part of the fabric of the community. Participating gives people a new sense of focus and helps them worry less about belonging.

Participating can be difficult. It takes courage and confidence for people to step out of their comfort zone and participate. Many find it difficult to participate due to time constraints; others lack the confidence needed to get started. Barriers like the English language, loneliness, background and conservative culture can prevent people from participating. Some cultures frown upon participating in activities with people of different backgrounds. Parents can also be overly protective of their children in these cultural groups, which can lead to cultural segregation. A lack of familiarity with the way things work may also deter people from participating.

Participation can be harder for older people. It may be more difficult for them to go outside of their culture, especially when their families are busy with their own lives. They can feel isolated. Programs that bring all generations together are especially helpful to the older generations.

Younger people tend to have more opportunities to participate through work and school. They often make friends more easily than older people. Children should be encouraged to be excited about participating. They should also be taught about diversity at an early age so they learn not to be afraid of differences, but to accept others’ cultures and beliefs.

Privacy was raised as an additional barrier to participating. People like their privacy. Neighbours are not as friendly and tend not to interact as often with their neighbours as they used to in past generations.

The digital age was also identified as a potential barrier to participating. Many people – newcomers and Canadians – would prefer to turn on the television or sit in front of the computer instead of actively participating in something outside of their home. It is easier and more comfortable.

Volunteering is just one way to participate. Many attendees commented that they volunteer in various locations for a wide variety of reasons. Volunteering helps people:

- learn and grow while helping others
- meet people
- get to know the city
- learn English
- learn about other cultures
- share their culture
- build trust
- gain confidence
- help make the community a better place
- Increase their perceived value.

Newcomers who feel they are ready to work can get frustrated by being told so often to volunteer. They would prefer to work, rather than volunteer. In some cases newcomers are told to volunteer, but not given any idea how. More guidance is needed to get them started in the right direction. Generally volunteer opportunities are not available for skilled people. They can volunteer their hands and feet but not their minds. It is helpful for people to volunteer for something they are passionate about. Volunteering needs to come from the heart.

A question was raised about whether or not men are told to volunteer as often as women are. It would be helpful for newcomers to understand the importance of volunteering, even if it is not related to the work they want to do. Many see volunteering as time taken away from finding employment, when it can really be a necessary stepping stone for them to build Canadian experience and connections that will help them find employment.

Attending classes was suggested as a good way to participate. Newcomers can attend English language classes, college or university classes, or even dance classes – basically whatever interests them. These classes provide opportunities to connect with others and learn new skills.

Living with others instead of just family was also discussed. Living with others helps newcomers learn Canadian culture and share their culture. It also helps people to feel less isolated.

Working seems to be the preferred way of participating. Some people felt that working is preferable to volunteering. Working fills a gap, provides income and helps people feel more productive.

Faith communities also provide many excellent ways to participate for all generations.

Being part of a social network of friends is another way to participate. Friendships build connections, reduce isolation and increase confidence.

The Blue Box recycling program was raised as a way to participate. This program is unique to the region and is an environmentally friendly initiative throughout the community.

Participating is a key way to connect. Connections within the community help newcomers feel more accepted.

Valued

Value suggests something of worth and often comes from within. People gain a sense of value when they feel they are making a contribution to their community. People often attach much of their value to the work that they do. Value can also help ease the sense of loss newcomers can have for things they no longer have. All people whether new immigrants or Canadians want to be respected, appreciated and recognized for what they have to offer. This type of treatment reflects value.

Newcomers often feel that they have to re-evaluate their value because they have to work through so much change.

There are many things that make newcomers feel like they have little or no value. These are some of the items that were mentioned during the discussions:

- Newcomers can be highly educated or very skilled but their knowledge and expertise is not recognized in Canada. They often have to re-earn their qualifications or choose other careers. It is very difficult to get a job without Canadian experience. It is very hard to feel valued when you do not have a job and cannot support your family.
 - Newcomers are often 'tripped up' by little things like grocery shopping. Stores are large here, but many are used to small corner markets. So many things are different here that it can be a struggle to get through each day.
 - Newcomers also have to deal with pre-conceived notions about how people will react to something
 - Newcomers often have to learn a new language when they arrive in Canada. They may have difficulty with their English communication skills which can reduce their self-confidence.
 - Many wives feel that they are less valued. In many cases they chose to stay home while their husbands worked and children went to school. They became isolated and disconnected from the community while their families grew more connected.
 - Colour of skin can make people perceive that they are less valued
 - Dependence on government or others makes people feel less valued.

It was mentioned more than once that the newcomers were 'somebody' at home but now they are 'nobody' in Canada.

Several ways to help people feel valued were identified. These include but are not limited to:

- Volunteering allows people to help others and give back while helping themselves grow
- Being treated kindly. People feel valued when someone does a kind deed for them like carrying their groceries. Even the smallest kind act can go a long way to showing someone they are valued.
- Teachers show they value children and their parents by supporting and encouraging them.
- Employment where people are paid for their valuable experience
- Recognition of skills and abilities in Canada
- Respecting their opinions
- Providing helpful, constructive feedback and words of encouragement to help people grow and increase their value
- Friendships and community connections
- Showing interest in learning about each other's experiences and culture
- Empowering others to allow them to build confidence

Value comes from within but it is impacted by circumstances and the world around us. A person's perceived value grows as their self-confidence grows. We all need to be mindful of the value of others and ensure we treat all people with dignity and respect.

Integrated

Integrated is defined by dictionary.com as "Combining or coordinating separate elements so as to provide a harmonious, integrated whole". Integration is linked to a sense of belonging. You are integrated when you feel you belong. However, people coming to a new community don't always want to be integrated because of the 'backlash' of their own culture. Examples may include dating, having friends outside of your culture or girls speaking to boys.

There were differing views on being integrated presented during the discussions. One group felt integrated or believed it was possible; others did not like the word integrated or did not feel they would ever be integrated. The notes below present these differing views.

Those who did not like the word 'integrated' or feel they would never be integrated shared these thoughts and ideas:

- The word integrated reminded some of the mid-70's when the disabled and people with special needs were integrated into schools and classrooms. Integration has a negative connotation for this group.
- Some felt that because Waterloo Region is so multicultural they feel like it will never be 'home'. They constantly feel like they are being treated differently.
- Some cities are into cultural segregation where people of specific cultures live in certain areas with each other separate from others. This is evident in Toronto. Some also viewed Kitchener-Waterloo Region in this same manner.

- There is a constant attitude of distinction between new Canadians and native Canadians that does not make new Canadians feel integrated. New Canadians feel like guests in their neighbours' homes.
- Integration comes from making friends and connections in the new communities they live in but many don't know the proper behavior for making friends in their neighbourhood or where to start.
- Language plays a big role in integration, often in a negative way.
- People never forget the familiarity of the homeland where they were born or raised.
- Challenges finding a job equal to their qualifications have a big impact on integration. Many feel that their skills are wasted here.
- Integration can mean 'assimilation' in some circles. Newcomers want to keep their identity.
- Immigrants should not always have to integrate to the other peoples' ways. It should be mutual.
- It can be very difficult to integrate if you are not from a privileged background
- Some workplaces strive for visual diversity but do not incorporate the various backgrounds and cultural perspectives.
- Some newcomers feel they are compromising their values by integrating.

Those who believe in integration and felt it was possible shared these comments:

- People are able to adapt to the Canadian culture comfortably at their own will.
- There are no religious restrictions in Canada. This helps with integration through faith.
- There is a desire in Waterloo region to learn about other cultures. This interest allows newcomers to feel more integrated – 'part of the family'.
- Canadian society is constantly in flux as we integrate with each other.
- People feel integrated when they feel comfortable, are not constantly reminded of their heritage and can share their experiences freely.
- They feel integrated when things come more naturally to them and they don't always have to think 'what about this?'.
- Newcomers can feel integrated when they have absorbed enough of the mainstream culture to feel comfortable. There is a process of knowing, learning and accepting different cultures and backgrounds.
- Some viewed that Canada is not only tolerant but interested in diversity which promotes integration.
- The Internet can be a helpful tool that provides information to assist with learning about other cultures.
- Speaking a common language is a unifying factor. English classes were helpful.
- First generation immigrants can feel integrated but still split between two countries as they have family in Canada and back 'home'. The generations that follow and grow up in Canada feel more integrated and have fewer ties in other countries.
- When people come from other countries Canadians integrate them into their lives just as much as newcomers integrate Canadians into theirs. We all need to be colour-blind because no one is different from anyone else.

- Food is a good way to integrate. It is a language that everyone speaks.

Integration is definitely a two-way street. It has to be a mutual experience where Canadians and newcomers integrate together. We all need to let go of our stereotypes and biases about others. We cannot judge others before getting to know them if we want to encourage integration. It is life's experiences that make us who we are, not our specific culture.

Summary

Acceptance, Participating, Valued and Integrated are all key components to helping newcomers feel as though they belong in their new communities. The sense or experience of belonging is different for everyone as each person has different life experiences that shape who they are. Many feel that they belong in their new communities, while others say in public that they feel like they belong but deep down they do not really believe it.

Communication and awareness are essential to bridging the gaps that exist between cultures. People also need to be sensitive to things they say and do when interacting with newcomers to provide a sense of welcome and belonging. It can be challenging to learn about newcomers and their experiences without giving them the sense that they will always be 'immigrants'.

A sense of contribution is also critical to encouraging belonging. Newcomers need to be productive members in their communities making conscious choices to participate. Canadians need to make conscious choices to be inclusive and welcoming to the different cultures that surround them.

Belonging takes effort from both the newcomers and the Canadians. Neither group can make someone belong. It has to be a mutual effort.

3.3 Points to Ponder

The points below were also made during the event but it was felt that they warrant individual mention as points to ponder. The quotations were taken directly as quotes from the scribe notes but may not reflect the comments of the speaker word-for-word. The sources for the quotations are anonymous.

"Educate yourself to be able to educate others."

Newcomers often grow and learn new skills that they later pass on to other newcomers through their work, play or volunteer commitments. This type of participating helps foster strong connections and is beneficial to both parties.

"Volunteering is not about the money. You don't just go and give your time for free. You are not paid monetarily but the rewards are great."

Volunteering can have many benefits for those who volunteer and those being supported and helped by the volunteers.

Immigrants are constantly learning and relearning who to be and how to do things. They feel like they are constantly being evaluated by Canadians. This is a stressful process for newcomers that Canadians need to be more sensitive to.

An older gentleman commented that 'he is blind because he cannot read the language, immobilized because he cannot drive and deaf because he cannot understand the language'.

"I will feel integrated the day I'm not called an Immigrant anymore"

"We all need to be colour-blind because no one is different from anyone else."

"As newcomers, the burden for belonging is placed on us and we would like that burden shared with the Canadians."

"Kids from all sort of different cultures are growing up together here. They are getting to know each other well and when they grow up they will understand each other and we won't have the (racial) problems any more. "

"The diversity of different cultures are all different branches but they all connect to the same tree."

"We are like a plant that is transplanted. We still keep some of our roots, but we grow new ones too."

"We also talked about the idea of change. There is no such thing as a full level of acceptance. It is constantly changing. When we look at these words, we are talking about opportunities that change us and allow us to change the community. Change is the only constant and we must challenge the status quo and insist on change. More opportunities like tonight that help us to connect and understand one another will help us to feel like we belong."

4.0 Working Conversation Cafe

'Working' was third café which was held on October 24, 2012. For the purpose of this conversation café, 'Working' was defined as 'finding meaningful employment'.

The format of the evening included a panel discussion of employers, as well as two discussion questions that were presented to the participants. Each table discussed their questions for a period of thirty-five minutes. Scribes were on hand at each table to capture the essence of the discussions. The scribe notes were used to form the basis of this report.

All material contained in this report was generated from participant feedback.

4.1 Demographics

The event was attended by approximately 43 immigrants, newcomers and other community members, including 14 employer representatives. The evening was supported by 16 volunteers.

A survey was provided for participants to complete with the intention of identifying the demographics of those who chose to attend. Twenty-one participants completed the survey.

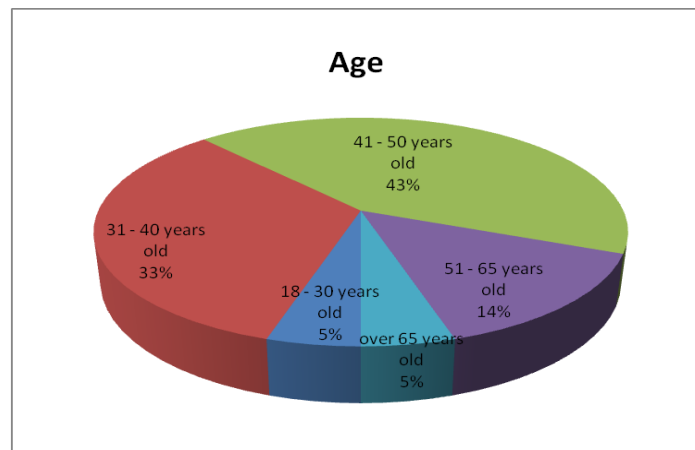
The respondents of the survey were categorized as follows:

Gender

Total 21 answers: Male 5 (24%), Female 16 (76%)

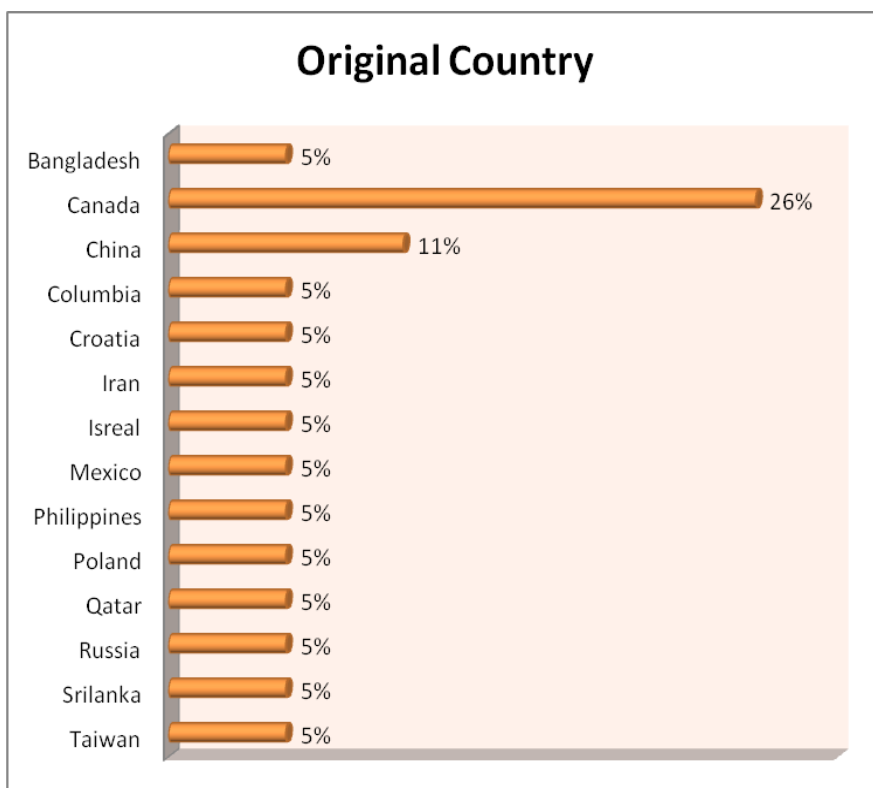
Age

Total 21 answers



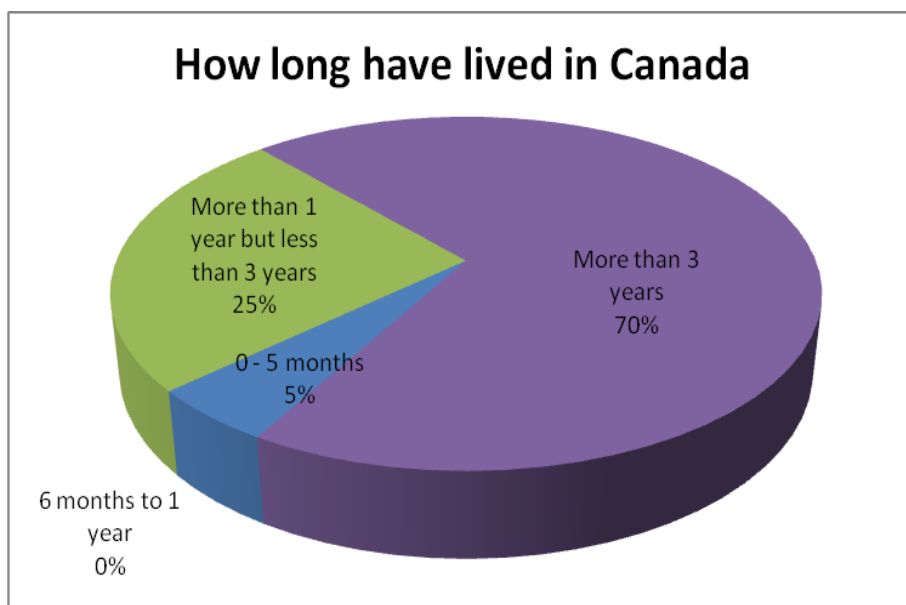
Original country

Total 19 answers, 14 different countries were represented

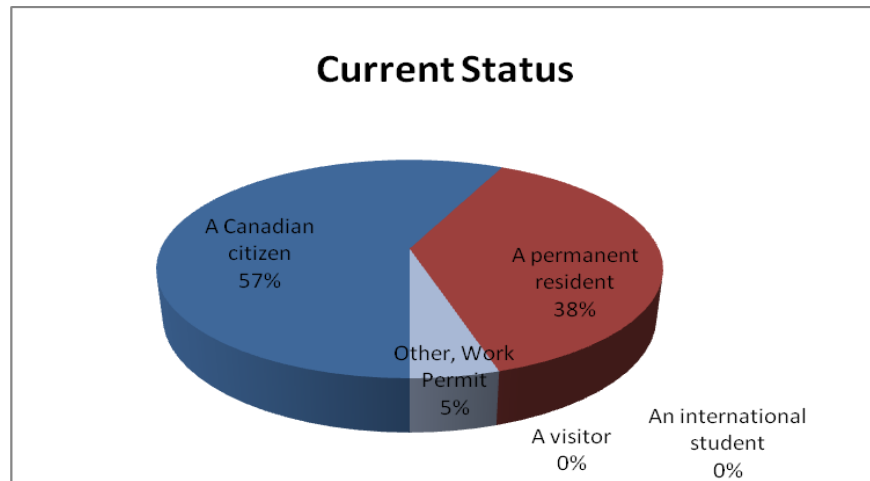


How long have you lived in Canada?

Total 20 answers

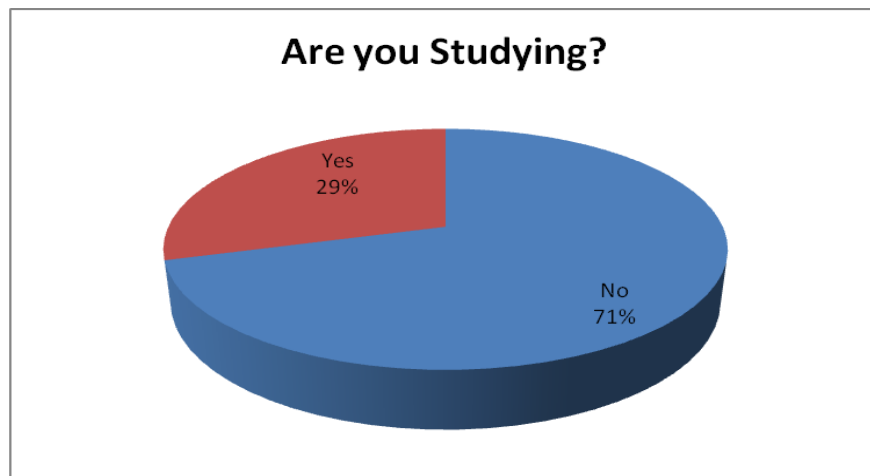


Please tell us your current Status



Are you studying now?

Total 17 answers: Yes, 5 (29%), No 12 (71%)



If yes, what are you studying?

- CGA certification
- Compension Specialist/Management
- German Second Language
- Masters' in Mechanical Engineering
- Visual Basic I course at Conestoga College

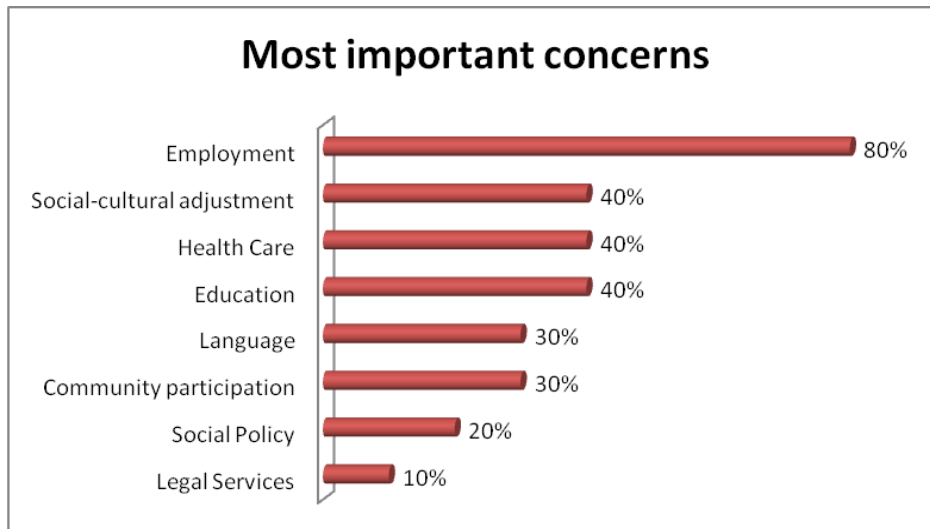
Are you employed now?

Total 18 answers: yes 10 (56%), no 8 (44%)



What are your most important concerns regarding your settlement in Canada?

Total 10 answers,



4.2 Discussion Results

The café started with a panel of two employer representatives and one immigrant. The following questions were answered by Panel members:

1. What best practices does your organization have regarding inclusive hiring?
2. What has your experience been as a newcomer looking for employment? What type of support is required by newcomers to improve their job search?
3. How can networking and understanding social media trends benefit the job search?

After question time with the panel, participants were invited to engage in dialogue at their tables by answering the following questions:

1. What are the greatest challenges to hiring newcomers in your workplace?
2. What are the greatest challenges to finding meaningful work in Waterloo Region?

Several key themes emerged from the discussions that took place. These themes are discussed below.

Inclusive Hiring

Companies are recognizing that their market is now global and their workforce should reflect the market they serve. As a result, they are starting to see the benefit and importance of having a diverse work force. As baby boomers retire over the next ten years there will be a depletion of workers in Canada. Employers will need to draw from all possible sources to fill positions for the future.

Best Practices

Some companies have started to develop internal best practices related to inclusive hiring. Some of these practices have been identified below:

Recruitment Pool

The recruitment pool should include people from all cultures, genders and ages as appropriate for the position. Social Media sites such as LinkedIn and recruiting firms attract people who are internationally trained. These are tools that can be used for recruiting people worldwide.

Companies are comprised of many cultures. Their work forces should be models of 'inclusion'. Instead of focusing on diversity and differences, companies should focus on similarities and inclusion.

Hiring Managers

Hiring managers are the key to building a diverse work force. Hiring managers must be trained to recognize that diversity can make a company strong and the people hired need to be representative of the people their company serves. Programs need to be put in place to train leadership on diversity issues.

Hiring Managers should be coached to ensure they understand the stress that newcomers are under throughout the job search process. Their application, résumés and interviews may not fully reflect their skills.

Hiring managers should be encouraged to hire the best candidate according to the job criteria, regardless of their place of origin.

Experience, skills and references

Newcomers often have great skills, experience and references that were gained in other countries. Hiring managers should allow newcomers to provide references and relevant work experience from their home countries rather than relying solely on Canadian work experience.

Some companies align hiring with the graduation of students such as international nurses who are becoming certified in Canada. Other companies provide work placements for newcomers so that they can gain some of the experience they need to grow into their future roles.

High tech industries tend to have more flexibility with accepting internationally trained candidates with little or no Canadian experience than professional industries.

Integration

Companies can include programs that will help newcomers to integrate more smoothly. Some examples include:

- Health care programs
- On-site language education, supported and funded by the company
- Celebrate diversity by hosting company events that allow employees to share aspects of culture such as a multicultural festivals or potlucks
- Encourage an active social committee that can bring everyone together for a variety of fun initiatives that build relationships

Challenges

Café participants also identified several challenges applicable to inclusive hiring. These challenges are discussed below.

Hiring Managers

The Hiring Manager is a key factor in determining which candidate gets the job. Hiring managers can be resistant to change. In addition, everyone carries their own personal biases. Hiring managers need to be open-minded and trained to accept diverse cultures and hire international candidates. They should also be educated and better equipped to understand the value of a diverse work team, the challenges newcomers face when applying for employment and get past their personal biases. Hiring managers need to listen and not judge based on factors other than the job criteria. Hiring managers also have to be mindful of diversifying their team; often there can be a tendency to 'hire themselves'.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most difficult aspects of the job search for newcomers. First impressions are critical. Interviews can be very stressful for newcomers as they try to make a good first impression.

Language and nervousness can be huge factors during interviews. Newcomers may struggle to sufficiently market their skills to potential employers because of a lack of confidence in their English language skills. In addition, they may not be familiar with the common practices used for sharing their skills and experience in a Canadian environment. Hiring managers may not give newcomers an equal chance at the job because of difficulty understanding them during the interviews. Interviewers could invite newcomers for a second round of interviews during which they may find themselves less nervous and represent themselves better. Employers need a personal connection with their employees; they need a certain comfort level and the ability to trust their employees. Employers should be aware of the level of comfort an interviewer has speaking to the candidate as it may impact the interviewers' decision making processes.

Experience, Skills and References

Immigrants need to understand how their credentials are recognized in Canada and what transferable skills they have before they apply for jobs and attend interviews. Having this understanding will help reduce false expectations and help them to be more prepared to make the changes needed to gain employment in their desired field or profession. Some industries, such as health care have strict regulations that must be adhered to. These regulations can be a barrier for companies to hire candidates or for candidates to find employment. A newcomer may be very skilled and fully qualified for the job but cannot be hired without proper credentials.

Language

Language was identified as one of the top barriers to finding employment. Childcare and transportation were also seen as barriers. Newcomers need to master the English language, find child care if needed and transportation in order to get a job and keep it.

Language can be a huge barrier in some cases. A higher command of the English language or specific 'Business English' may be required for some roles. Some jobs require strong English skills in order for the candidate to get the job, while other jobs can allow newcomers to develop English skills while on the job. Employees must be able to convey their ideas to their team and the people they interact with. For example, health care practitioners must be able to understand their patients and each other; customer service representatives must be able to communicate about their products and services to their customers; technical roles will require strong technical skills but could develop their language skills on the job. Many internationally trained nurses are working in retirement homes or long term care facilities instead of in acute care because of the level at which they are able to communicate. In addition, most job training takes place in English. Candidates need to have a strong enough command of the English language to make the training valuable.

Company

Some companies do not have a diverse customer base; as a result they may not see the need for hiring a diverse workforce. Companies may not be connected with communities of

newcomers. Small, medium and large businesses all have different needs and resources. They will have varying amounts of time, money and resources to investing in training newcomers.

Job Search

Searching for a job in our current economy is a difficult task, but searching for a job in our current economy in a totally new country is even more difficult. Searching for meaningful employment in a new country is an intensive and demanding process. It is a learning process that requires a lot of reading, research and patience.

Some best practices and challenges related to the search for meaningful work were identified through the conversation café discussions. These have been outlined below.

Best Practices

Be Prepared

It is critical to be organized and prepared right from the very start of the job search. Newcomers need to know what they want to do, be passionate about it and pursue it. Newcomers should identify the industry they want to work in and do their homework in advance. Research the type of jobs available in their chosen industry, where the jobs are available, and the qualifications needed to get those jobs. They should also have an understanding of what the employer's needs and expectations are in various types of roles within their chosen industry. Lots of time can be lost if these key parameters are not defined in advance of the job search.

Diversity can be an asset. Diversity can help newcomers stand out. They have different experiences and strengths. Newcomers need to know their strengths, weaknesses and the value that they can bring to a company. It is helpful to identify what they need to learn to be successful in the work they want to pursue and then start learning. In addition to learning it is critical to implement the things they have learned. Newcomers need to be quick learners to ensure they have solid skills to pursue work. It is also helpful to strengthen their English language skills throughout their job search. They should never indicate to an employer that they want the job so they can improve their English skills.

When writing a resume, newcomers should include a customized cover letter for each position they apply to. Potential employers are most impressed with people who take the time to write a cover letter. Newcomers can use the cover letter to sell their skills in a way specific to the company they are applying to.

When preparing for interviews it is helpful to practice. Work with someone to practice responding to questions that could possibly be asked during an interview. Practice and preparation will help reduce nervousness and allow the newcomer to represent themselves more confidently to a potential employer. Candidates need to be able to prove their skills during an interview.

Newcomers will need to be prepared for a potentially long road ahead. It can take months or even years to get a job in their chosen industry. Keep focused and never give up!

Use available resources

There are many resources available to help newcomers in their job searches. Social media is rapidly becoming a powerful tool that is used by more and more employers every day. Newcomers can use social media for research and to 'introduce' themselves to potential employers. Research can help candidates to be more prepared for interviews, gain better understanding of the industry they are interested in, and find potential employers. Social media can also be used to find something to relate to in order to create a common bond with a potential employer.

Other tools are available to help newcomers in their job searches in places like YMCA, Libraries, Community Centres, Working Centres and Immigration Centres.

Network

Networking is also key to a successful job search. Face-to-face contact is still more important than contact through social media, phone or e-mail. Face-to-face leaves a more memorable impression and puts a 'face to the name' so to speak.

Newcomers need to be open to meeting people and be prepared to network. Networking will also help newcomers to make some friends that they can share life with. Networking allows people to share experiences and help each other. It is important not to judge people when networking as they could be a potential lead to work some day. Someone they may meet while networking may be able to connect them to a potential employer that they may not have found otherwise.

Networking is also important for allowing newcomers to help others in their job search journey. Helping others will help them to learn and succeed.

Newcomers should make appointments for networking first thing in the morning to avoid getting distracted from the task.

Experience

Experience will aid a newcomer's job search. It is helpful to find ways and places to get practice and job experience in the field they want to pursue. This could be through volunteering, work placements or being open to entry level positions to get a foot in the door of a good company. Newcomers should be open to experience different kinds of work in order to gain needed experience.

Newcomers can also take opportunities to volunteer in areas that use their skills in the company they work for. This experience could act as a stepping stone to dream job or could lead to an internal promotion because they are a proven worker. The retention of the employee benefits both the company and the employee.

Everybody has some form of leadership skills. Candidates should be prepared to identify the kind of things that they have done to use and broaden their leadership skills.

Challenges

Newcomers face many challenges in their search for meaningful work. They want to find the 'right' job but are often forced to take the first job they are offered as a 'survivor job' to make ends meet. They can also face a 'catch 22' scenario – do they go to school first so they will be able to get a better job or do they go to work so they can afford to live. Many newcomers with families have the choice made for them – they must provide for their family by any means possible. They can get into a cycle of taking 'survivor jobs' and get stuck in roles that are not meaningful work for them.

The job search is a stressful, intense and demanding process that is also extremely time consuming. It is a full time job that has to compete with so many other activities – finding housing, schools, child care and learning a new language. It can be difficult to combine the job search with their private life.

Some of the other challenges faced by newcomers during their job searches are identified below.

Canadian Culture and Process

Newcomers may not be familiar or comfortable with aspects of Canadian culture. The job search process is part of Canadian culture. The application and interview process may not be well understood by newcomers who try to navigate their way through it. Newcomers need to be familiar with selling and interviewing techniques that are acceptable in Canadian culture.

One of the key steps to starting a job search is to understand where they want to work and what they want to do. Even this task can be difficult as jobs can have intimidating titles (e.g., Imaging Technician = Photocopying) and it is difficult to know what type of work they are qualified for.

Language Skills

English language skills are key to a successful job search. Face-to-face interviews and customer-facing jobs can be challenging because of language issues. In some cases the interview processes is more difficult for the newcomer than actually doing the job.

In addition, potential employers may be intimidated by a newcomer's name on their job application or résumé. They may be hesitant to call the applicant if they are not sure of how to pronounce their name.

Experience and Qualifications

Newcomers may be highly skilled and educated but their skills and education do not always transfer equally in Canada. Newcomers need to understand the path of their education and employment in Canadian terms. They also need to be able to share their experiences in a meaningful way to Canadian employers. Canadian employers, in turn, need to inquire more to understand the full meaning of stories told by newcomers. An example was shared about someone running across a village to pass on a crucial message. The employer did not realize that the person had to run across the village because phones were not available. Employers need to be mindful that not every society is as advanced as our Canadian society.

Regulatory bodies make it difficult for professionals to find work in their field. This issue is especially prevalent in the Health Care industry. Re-certification is costly and may not be a realistic possibility for many newcomers especially since there is no guarantee that once they achieve the pre-requisites they will be accepted to their chosen programs or jobs.

Newcomers are often told to gain experience by volunteering. They can find this frustrating because they give so much time for free and do not necessarily see the benefits of volunteering.

References can also be a barrier for newcomers in their job search. They may get through the whole hiring process but they have no Canadian references. It may be possible to use someone from their home country but a translator and consideration of time zones may be required.

Job Availability

Waterloo Region is a very competitive market. There is lots of diversity in the region which makes the region attractive to newcomers, but it also raises the level of competition for meaningful work. In addition, there are several colleges and universities in the region graduating classes of students each year. Newcomers have to compete with others in the region as well as graduates from the local schools. It is not unheard of for hundreds or even thousands of people to apply for one or two positions.

Newcomers wanting to work in skilled, specialized companies may find limited opportunities close to home in the Waterloo Region. Some may find themselves having to move or commute to larger cities like London, Mississauga or Toronto.

In some cases employers are not open to hiring newcomers. They may not want or be able to invest in training.

Support

Support is available to newcomers to aid them with the jobs search process but they don't always know how or where to find it. Newcomers without family here can feel lost and unprepared to get started.

Networking is a great tool for support, but it can be very difficult for newcomers. They often initially have limited social networks and limited time to invest in meeting people.

Newcomers also need to be careful of where they get their information from. Information from people who are struggling with their own job search can be discouraging and harmful. It is important for newcomers to have access to the right information, services and connections.

Social media tools are available for support; however newcomers may not readily have access to the tools or be familiar with how to use them appropriately. Linked In is becoming a popular tool for hiring managers.

Use of Social Media

Social media tools are becoming increasingly more important in the job search for meaningful work. Face-to face communication is still very important, but social media has many benefits.

Social media is good for employers because it allows them to seek out employees from a global workforce. Key information can be gained from social media and social media allows employers to get their 'face' into the global market. Employers can also get references through LinkedIn from the newcomer's country of origin.

Social media is good for job candidates because many employers are equipped to discuss their workplaces informally on these sites. Social media tools also allow people to recommend people or give more information than the job description. Social media is a good tool for job candidates to learn about their preferred job sector and make a first contact.

Social media can give newcomers an advantage if they have already connected with an employer in some way.

Summary

Finding meaningful work is critical for newcomers to feel like a valuable part of their community and support their families. Waterloo Region is a very competitive job market with many different industries to choose from but many people applying for the same jobs. Some companies in the region are recognizing the value of hiring a diverse workforce while others are not.

Hiring managers are key to the job search process. They review applications, interview and decide upon the best candidate for the job. Hiring managers who are trained to hire a diverse workforce have a better understanding of the issues newcomers face when looking for work.

Newcomers often have great skills and experience that will make them an asset to a potential employer but in many cases their biggest challenges are representing themselves and selling their skills appropriately. The job search process is very demanding and stressful. Newcomers need to be prepared to work diligently and be patient throughout their job search. Many newcomers get trapped into a cycle of taking 'survivor jobs' that are beneath their skills levels because they give up hope of finding meaningful employment or they need to provide for their families.

4.3 Points to Ponder

The points below were also made during the event but it was felt that they warrant individual mention as points to ponder. The quotations were taken directly as quotes from the scribe notes but may not reflect the comments of the speaker word-for-word. The sources for the quotations are unknown.

- The Generation coming up in the workforce is not replacing the skill sets of the baby boomers. There will be a growing shortage of employees with specialized skills. Employers will need to plan ahead to ensure jobs requiring specialized skills can be filled in the future.

- A person's income is closely related to their sense of belonging. People with higher income levels can often have an increased sense of belonging in their new environment.
- It takes a lot of confidence and bravery to leave your home country and start a new life in a new country. Newcomers use a large variety of skills to organize their move and adapt to their new country. These skills are transferable skills that the newcomers can leverage when seeking employment.