The Power and Struggles of Ethno-Cultural Groups

The importance of ethno-cultural groups in the life of a community cannot be overstated. Supporting them has often been viewed as “good to do” for the groups they represent. Less consideration has been given to their impact on the wider community. The reality is that the presence of strong ethno-cultural groups is imperative for communities that want to be economically powerful, culturally rich, socially connected and attractive as a place to live, work and play.

Ethno-cultural groups indicate the presence of a diverse, multicultural population. They contribute to belonging and inclusion for members of those communities. They signify vivacious and varied contributions to local arts, culture, cuisine, business, place-making, ways of thinking and doing, and more. They and the wider communities they represent are a mechanism for the attraction and retention of new immigrants and others who value communities which are dynamic and diverse.

To be vibrant and effective community builders, ethno-cultural groups must be empowered and hold an equal seat at economic development and community leadership tables. At the Immigration Partnership, we’re engaged in a process of mutual learning with established and emerging ethno-cultural leaders in Waterloo Region. They tell us they want empowerment through space, knowledge, resources and voice. We are considering together how the Immigration Partnership’s platform can contribute.

This issue of our Newsletter focuses on ethno-cultural groups in Waterloo Region. It explores their history, development and desires. It profiles organizations and programs prioritizing their development. It shares the experiences of several established and emerging ethno-cultural groups.

We hope you enjoy this Newsletter and that it encourages you to help build up and create space for the amazing ethno-cultural groups and communities across Waterloo Region in economic and community development processes.

Tara Bedard
Executive Director, Immigration Partnership
Ethno-Cultural Group Development in Waterloo Region

Ethno-Cultural Groups Helping Newcomers and Others

Lucia Harrison, CEO, Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre

When I travel to another country, I love to meet the locals. There are also special moments when you meet other Canadians with whom you can connect at a more personal level. You share language and so much more. This is what happens when newcomers come to Canada; especially if English is not their first language, but even if it is. When my family immigrated to Canada, my parents had taken English lessons but they were far from fluent. They talked to their new neighbours in English to improve their language skills. However, when they got together with other Dutch folks, they could express their joys, concerns, fears and hopes much more eloquently. My mom and dad joined a Dutch Canadian club when they first arrived where they enjoyed familiar traditions, food and companionship. Dad used it as a networking tool to find work. He went through the van der and van den’s in the phone book to expand his network and look for job leads. Those were the early years. Later, through their Dutch friends, they joined a Canadian sailing club and a Canadian Square Dance club. They maintained their Dutch friends and they also had a huge circle of Canadian ones. I cannot overestimate the importance of the emotional support and networking advantages of their Dutch connections in their early years of settling.

I think about the roots of my own agency, the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre. It is the child of the KW Folk Arts Council. Members of various ethnic associations came together during Canada’s Centennial in 1967 and to put a float in the Canada Day parade to proudly highlight the diversity of this community. The experience was so positive they started the Folk Arts Council, and eventually the KW Multicultural Festival. While their initial purpose was to celebrate diversity, they found that people came to them seeking “settlement” advice. Through this process the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, a settlement agency, was born. What I have heard from many people is that no question is stupid or silly if you know that the person you are talking to has gone through the same settlement process as you. That is why 90 per cent of our staff are immigrants and know another language. This ensures that we can provide settlement supports in a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment.

But formal services only go so far. Ethno-cultural associations play many important roles in our community. They help newcomers settle into our community in ways that services can not, which is the first step to creating sense of belonging. People who feel belonging tend to stay put, work, start businesses, employ others, volunteer and give back to their community in many ways. Established and emerging ethnic associations preserve and celebrate traditions and cultures in Waterloo Region. As groups develop a sense of place and belonging, they share that culture with others and care about the broader community. Many of the oldest and newer ethnic associations have raised significant funds for our local hospitals and other community service groups. It is all part of a continuum that serves us well.
Why and How to Support Ethno-Cultural Groups

Gebre Berihun, Health Promoter, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre, and Aleksandra Petrovic, Executive Director, Social Development Centre Kitchener-Waterloo

“Ethno-cultural groups” are groups of people who share a common origin, history, culture and identity. Their members are likely to enjoy emotional attachment and informal support among themselves, and have an abiding sense of belonging that lies in the group’s culture, history, shared origin and identity.

One condition for these groups to function in a new environment is the continuation of informal social networking among their members, occasioned by regular face-to-face opportunities to reaffirm connections and identity. Especially for new arrivals, ethno-cultural groups become a comfortable, safe and familiar transitioning environment that provides for a continuation of their sense of belonging. Norms of reciprocity strengthen trust and preserve individual and collective identity. These are the outcomes of social interaction and mutual support.

Relating to others from one’s country of origin is driven by several motivations, including self-interest and adjusting to a new socio-economic environment. Research shows that people’s tendency to remain grounded in their roots is a universal phenomenon associated with migration. Established and emerging ethno-cultural groups in Waterloo Region are the result of the desire of newcomers to express their identity along with the search for psychological, economic and social security. Without a developed sense of identity, autonomy and confidence, the group’s capacity to support its members, to participate in the life of the community or to collaborate with other groups is significantly diminished.

In a rapidly changing community, the Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrant Concerns undertook an assessment of the needs and assets of ethno-cultural leaders in Waterloo Region. The aim was to learn more about the role of informal emerging ethno-cultural community leaders, what they need to be successful in supporting their community and what the broader social structures and organizations can do to support the diverse ethno-cultural groups in Waterloo Region.

The results show that ethno-cultural groups fill a gap by providing informal, emotional, psychological, social and economic support to their members. There are formally and informally organized groups. One common theme is that such groups are organized to maintain their culture, history and shared identity. They depend on informal volunteer leaders and operate with very minimal resources. To sustain the valuable work of emerging ethno-cultural groups, the following supports are crucial:

- Dedicated funding for ethno-specific groups and associations.
- Common and affordable space for cultural gatherings, meetings and activities.
- Supports for networking and collaboration with other groups and organizations.
- Strong neighbourhood-based social networks and social inclusion of ethno-cultural community members.
- Nurturing of current and future ethno-cultural leaders.
- Reflection of community diversity in mainstream organizations and local governments.
- Enhanced inclusive information sharing systems between local organizations, all levels of government and ethno-cultural groups.

We encourage formal organizations and local governments to respond to their needs and empower them to help Waterloo Region flourish.
**Why engage ethno-cultural communities?**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Engaging Ethno-Cultural (EC) communities can benefit municipalities in the following ways:</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Better knowledge of community issues and solutions</strong></td>
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<td>• Creates a channel and mechanism to become aware of issues faced by specific communities and neighborhoods (e.g. safety, service accessibility)</td>
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<td>• Challenges (or validates) assumptions about the needs of EC communities</td>
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<td>• Ensures that community expertise and knowledge are incorporated into problem definition and problem solving processes</td>
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<td>• Strengthens decision making and planning processes by incorporating the perspectives of diverse communities</td>
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<td><strong>Effective service delivery</strong></td>
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<td>• Enhances ability to deliver effective services that meet the unique needs of EC communities</td>
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<td>• Creates a more proactive and responsive service delivery model that can adapt to changing demographics</td>
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<td>• Facilitates appropriate use of service delivery resources through proactive anticipation of changing needs</td>
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<td>• Provides a channel for contacting and communicating information to EC communities during emergencies and disasters such as floods and fires</td>
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<td><strong>Strong economy</strong></td>
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<td>• Assists with attraction and retention of newcomers to supplement available workforce</td>
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<td>• Makes your community more competitive nationally and internationally, and contributes to a more vibrant economy</td>
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<td>• Encourages greater participation of EC communities in the economy of your region</td>
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<td>• Creates champions within communities who will assist in attracting other newcomers</td>
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<td><strong>Vibrant social and cultural life</strong></td>
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<td>• Enhances the cultural life of your municipality through greater participation in arts and culture activities and events</td>
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<td>• Maximizes the social and cultural knowledge of the municipality by incorporating diverse world views and knowledge (e.g. traditional ecological knowledge, a variety of artistic traditions)</td>
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<td>• Reduces marginalization and creates more equitable social relationships between all communities</td>
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<td>• Fosters openness to diversity, learning and innovation</td>
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<td><strong>Greater public confidence and trust</strong></td>
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<td>• Creates a better overall image of your municipality as being welcoming and inclusive</td>
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<td>• Enhances community confidence in municipality’s desire to engage with EC communities</td>
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<td>• Engenders trust in civic engagement processes and increases EC communities’ confidence and capacity for engagement in civic life</td>
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<td>• Increases willingness of communities to collaborate in municipal initiatives</td>
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<td><strong>Community well-being</strong></td>
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<td>• Prevents long-term effects of exclusion and contributes to safer communities for all residents</td>
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<td>• Revitalizes sense of community through equitable and inclusive participation, and contributes to overall community well-being</td>
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<td>• Encourages full participation of all citizens, and honours their right to have a say in decisions that impact their lives</td>
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*Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities: A Guide for Municipalities, retrieved on October 7, 2019 from: https://www.auma.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs_Initiatives/WIC/engaging_ec_coms_guide.pdf*
The Family Centre recognizes the challenges ethno-cultural groups and organizations face. These challenges manifest as systemic oppression and dominant narratives, which do not necessarily align, describe or acknowledge the worldview, values and lived experiences of the ethno-cultural community.

Systemic oppression often forces ethno-cultural communities to adopt the methods, language and practices of the dominant culture; thus sabotaging their own experiences, needs and values, and paralysing their growth as unique entities.

There are four ways in which the Family Centre supports ethno-cultural groups and their organizational development: in-house partnerships, community partnerships, community rentals and special projects. In particular, the Family Centre created a community hub using the incubator model that includes small grassroots ethno-cultural organizations. It provides office spaces, resources and mentorship opportunities for these organizations to grow towards self-sufficiency and share social benefits with the larger community.

The Family Centre also runs the Resilience Project, which promotes resilience in children, families and communities, including ethno-cultural groups, through programming, research, community partnerships and direct supports.

The Family Centre promotes organizational growth and resilience by offering an environment where ethno-cultural group members can share experiences and learn from each other. Over the past years, several hub members, such as Muslim Social Services of KW, have grown from the incubation phase and become self-sufficient organizations. Similarly, through the Resilience Project others have achieved measurable outcomes in the domains of sense of security, sense of belonging and commitment to learning.
When we first gathered multicultural community leaders together 20 years ago, our goal was to learn what Waterloo Region’s multicultural communities needed from us. We also shared information on how to access our counselling services with them so their communities could reach us. We all learned a lot! We learned the importance of offering services in other languages, how to work with respect with our fellow humans without forgetting all that makes us unique, and most importantly, not to make assumptions about what people needed from us.

At that time, we believed that once we had gathered to share and learn, the space we had created would disband. Instead, 20 years later, we have found new ways to gather people together to contribute with what they know, to share what migration has been like for them, to be inspired by one another and to put all their great ideas into action. Based on what ethno-cultural leaders have told us about what is important for them, we created initiatives such as the Bridging Resources monthly meetings, the Together is Better shared office space, the Newcomer Partnership Grants program (in partnership with United Way Waterloo Region Communities and KW Community Foundation) and our Leadership Development Training.

Waterloo Region is rich in diversity. Every day someone joins our community with new perspectives and ideas, and that also means new challenges. We know that as an agency we will never be able to reflect all of that diversity within our staff. Therefore, our aim is to focus on what we do best, and find other supports when we need them. Even when our clients are from the majority culture and have lived in Canada all their lives, it can be very difficult to navigate systems to get what they need. Getting assistance for mental health is even harder when from a visible minority, dealing with language barriers and or just figuring out the culture. That is when the connections we have built over the years come into play. Not only because community groups can assist people in finding us when someone needs professional support, but these grassroots groups offer support, encouragement and feedback without judgment.
Services for newcomers, immigrants and refugees have grown and expanded over the years in Waterloo Region. This has been great for the community, but it also presents a challenge to stay innovative and relevant as a community agency.

Fortunately, because we have trusting, long-standing relationships with different leaders, they help us to stay informed about what is already happening and where they need us to come in as their partner in community mental health.

Waterloo Region Multicultural Connections

Diana Palmerin Velasco, Community Engagement Coordinator, Immigration Partnership’s Belong Steering Group

In 2017, 59 per cent of immigrant and refugee respondents to the Immigration Partnership’s community survey felt isolated in Waterloo Region. Respondents also reported that having family and friends in the community had most helped in combating social isolation.

When people migrate, social networks and relationships are disconnected and not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to settle in a community where family and friends reside. This is where ethno-specific groups and organizations play a key role in helping newcomers settle, integrate to their new country and preserve their cultural heritage.

In Waterloo Region we are fortunate to have more than 100 formal and informal ethno-cultural groups that provide invaluable supports to immigrants and refugees every day. The diversity of these groups is impressive. Some, founded long ago, are consolidated and have access to resources. Others are just emerging and are figuring out how they can best serve and support their communities. Recognizing the importance of ethno-cultural groups, the Immigration Partnership’s Social Inclusion Working Group created the Waterloo Region Multicultural Connections Forum. The aim is to bring together different ethno-cultural communities to exchange experiences, promote social and personal connections across Waterloo Region’s ethno-cultural communities and explore potential collective action.

In November 2018, the first Waterloo Region Multicultural Connections Forum took place at Kitchener Public Library. Over 35 people from 20 different communities participated in round-table discussions, deciding that there was a strong need to empower local ethno-cultural groups. In April 2019, a follow-up session explored what the leaders and members of various ethno-cultural groups meant by empowerment: Having access to space to meet with their own communities and with other ethno-cultural groups; access to knowledge and resources to strengthen their groups; and access to advocacy tools and opportunities to shape and improve their wider community. This summer, we shared these insights with the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo within their strategic planning processes.

Most recently, in August 2019 the Social Inclusion Working Group organized the second WR Multicultural Connections Forum at the Kitchener Market. It allowed for networking across ethno-cultural communities and a panel discussion in which the Central Ontario Chinese Cultural Centre, Shamrose for Syrian Culture and Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo shared their learnings and journey in Waterloo Region. The Immigration Partnership will continue to host periodic forums to deepen connections and spark actions to empower Waterloo Region’s ethno-cultural communities.
Local Ethno-Cultural Groups At a Glance

**Waterloo Region Chinese Community Association**

Yan Li, Secretary-General, *Waterloo Region Chinese Community Association*

Waterloo Region Chinese Community Association (WCCA) is an Ontario-registered non-profit organization serving and advocating for its members and the ethnic Chinese community in Waterloo Region. It was founded in 2007 by the then Executive Committee of Chinese Professional Association of Canada’s Technology Triangle (CPACTT). The CPACTT, founded in 2003, served as a platform for ethnic Chinese professionals to share knowledge in Canada’s Technology Triangle (Waterloo Region and its surrounding areas).

Over the years, CPACTT grew to become the largest Chinese association in the Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge-Guelph areas. The success of CPACTT motivated its founders and management to reach more diverse groups of Chinese Canadians and develop better platforms to serve the ethnic Chinese community as a whole. WCCA formed as a parent organization to CPACTT to reach deeper into Waterloo Region’s Chinese community. The objectives of WCCA include:

- Serving and representing the interest of the local ethnic Chinese community.
- Enriching the quality of life and social standing of Chinese Canadians.
- Nurturing professional development and business opportunities.
- Helping our future generations and newcomers to develop their full potential.
- Enhancing the contributions of the Chinese community to society.
- Preserving and promoting Chinese culture and heritage.

**Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo**

Fidelia Otokhina, Director, Marketing and Communications, *Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo*

Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo (NIROW) started in 2016 by a group of people who had positive experience settling in Canada. The group helps Nigerian families who are new to the Region settle and integrate, and supports established Nigerian families develop a strong and thriving Nigerian community.

NIROW’s work is guided by the values of excellence, trust and unity. NIROW builds a sense of community by investing in educational programs, recreational events and community services. Its objectives are:

- To provide social activities, such as “Plantain Picnic,” and “Indefest”, to create opportunities for Nigerians in the community to meet and network regularly.
- To ensure a soft landing in the community by connecting new immigrants with appropriate community resources including career mentorship, job mentorship, childcare, free interest loans and career planning.
community resources including career mentorship, job mentorship, childcare, free interest loans and career planning.

- To facilitate mentorship by matching newcomers with established families and students willing to share their life experiences.
- To strategically support, mentor and locate trusted Nigerians in key sectors like politics, information technology, human resources and entrepreneurship.
- To offer workshops and seminars which provide people with skills to successfully advance in their careers.

Despite some challenges like lack of commitment, funds and conflicting schedules, NIROW is a recognized group in the Region which organizes successful events and makes positive impacts on job search, referrals and family settlement.

Iranian Community of Region of Waterloo

Nafiseh Moghimi, member of the Iranian community

Iranian immigration to Canada rose with Iran’s revolution in 1979. The Iranian community of Waterloo Region started almost at the same time. There were no official meetings or organizations at that time, but most Iranians kept in touch with each other to get help when needed and to socialize with Farsi speaking people. As the number of Iranian people increased in the Region, different groups formed based on interests such as religion, culture and art and literature.

The Quran Session Group (Muslim faith) has existed for more than 30 years. It offers weekly prayers and holy book reading with occasional religious celebrations and gatherings open to the Iranian community and, sometimes, other communities. The Baha’i Community (Baha’i faith) has many members who meet weekly and organize different activities including faith practice, cultural celebrations and music classes. The Christian community also holds gatherings and Iranian national celebrations in their churches.

In 2002, a non-profit organization called KW Iranian was established. It organizes events for the entire community and makes connections between the Iranian and other communities in the Region. The Iranian Student Association of Waterloo (ISAW) consists mainly of University of Waterloo students and professors. They organize Iranian cultural celebrations such as Nowrouz and Yalda Night. With the increase in the number of post-secondary Iranian international students in the Region, this group likely has the largest membership. There are also many small groups focused on Persian art and literature, including Shahnameh, Sharhe-Eshtag, Del-o-Jan and Partov.

A Persian School was established in 1996 to teach Farsi (writing and reading) to children. It was initially volunteer-based and offered classes on Saturday during school years. It is now a registered Dana School (not-for-profit), offering an educational curriculum based on the Iranian curriculum.

Still, the Iranian community faces challenges. It lacks venues, management and budgets to support cultural programs for special celebrations like Nowrouz. There is also limited child programming and activities to maintain connection to cultural heritage and a lack of programs for the elderly, especially those with limited English skills.

[Image of Karaoke Night at Iranian Student Association of Waterloo (ISAW)]
Rohingya Community at Home in Waterloo Region
Saifullah Muhammad, cofounder of the Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative (CRDI)

On December 14, 2006, 13 Rohingya people from refugee camps in Bangladesh arrived at the then-Kitchener-Waterloo Reception House through the refugee resettlement program coordinated by the Canadian Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

They were part of a wave of 250,000 Rohingya who fled their native Burma (Myanmar) during the military’s “Operation Clean Nation” in 1991-1992. Prior to fleeing, many Rohingya witnessed their homes and villages being burned, their relatives being arbitrarily detained and killed, their property confiscated and their rights denied. Since 2010, the Bangladesh government has not issued exit visas for the third-country resettlement of Rohingya refugees to other countries so the Rohingya who have arrived in Canada since 2010 have come from countries like Malaysia, Australia and Saudi Arabia. Currently, approximately 500 Rohingya live in Waterloo Region.

In 2010, many Rohingya in Waterloo Region became Canadian citizens. It was emotional for the community to regain citizenship after having been stripped of citizenship from their place of birth and homeland, Myanmar. The resettlement process opened a future of exciting possibilities and started a new life. Rohingya who call Waterloo Region home are thankful for these opportunities which are fundamental for a positive life. Rohingya youth, mostly students, established an organization called the Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative (CRDI), which works closely with the government and local and international organizations to advocate for the Rohingya people. It promotes the importance of education for Rohingya people and works with postsecondary institutions to develop scholarship opportunities. It also supports newly arrived Rohingya to integrate in Waterloo Region, conducts academic seminars, leadership workshops, conferences, rallies and sports tournaments for the community.
Immigration Partnership People

Anna Barth, Neuro-Linguistic Therapist and Belong Steering Group member

I come from a German father and a Polish-Hungarian mother. I was raised in a city that was a central meeting point for Romanian, Ukrainian, Slovak and Polish people in Hungary. I moved to Canada in 2014. I am a Neuro-linguistic therapist and coach, and a Master of Psychotherapy student at Wilfried Laurier University.

Ethno-cultural diversity was a firsthand experience in my childhood. It made me feel that cultural acceptance would be the easiest part of my immigration process. By the time I earned my permanent resident status in Canada, my palette of friends was more colorful than I would have ever imagined. I made friends from Iran, Egypt, Rwanda, Poland, the Mennonite Community, as well as from countries that were historically, as I was taught, our [Hungary’s] enemies like Romania and Serbia. I quickly forgot what I had been taught and understood we are here for the same reason. We can be politically colorblind. It is our own personal choice.

I also learned about the Canadian work style and how Mexican, Jamaican, Scottish and Indian people communicate. I was lucky to meet communities through the Immigration Partnership and its Multicultural Connections Forum, which sparked numerous great friendships that have lasted until today.

Currently, I study Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy, aiming to incorporate neuroscience and an individual’s spiritual belief to the process of psychotherapy. I also offer a “Recovery from Immigration” therapy as a coach and former newcomer. I feel the urge to give back, or to better say “give forward,” and let people experience the power of being recognized and encouraged.

Eltag Elkhalifa, K-W Multicultural Centre Program Manager and Work Steering Group member

I moved from Sudan in 1993 and started working in St. Catharines in Niagara Region. I moved to Kitchener in August 1998 and I have been working with the non-profit sector since 1999. I moved to Waterloo Region looking for a decent paying job and better education opportunities for my kids.

In the search I did before moving here, I found that Waterloo Region was home to two of the best Canadian universities, its per capita income was higher than in many regions and the rate of unemployment was lower compared to many regions. Currently, I am a program manager at the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre.

Since I moved to Kitchener, I have volunteered for many community organizations: YMCA Host Program (2001-2010); Employment and Income Support Community Advisory Committee and Community Services Committee of the Council of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (2012-2014); Secretary of the African Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and Area (2008 to 2010); Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region Board Member (2009-2016); Sudanese Canadian Association President (2017-present); African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) Forum member (2017-present); Immigration Partnership Work Steering Group member (2017-present); and Kitchener Mayor’s Task Force on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion member.

As Waterloo Region has become more ethnically diverse and welcoming, immigrants develop a sense
of belonging which translates into adopting the new culture easier. Immigrants make their home where they feel welcomed and accepted. That is why Waterloo Region is my home! My plan to move to this region worked well for me: I got better paid jobs in work environments that respect and maintain diversity and inclusion, my three kids go to university in Waterloo and I feel that I am part of this community.

Waterloo Region has recently become a warm home for so many immigrants. Let’s all work together to make it one of the best places to live in.

Leila Jalali, Clinical Manager and Immigration Partnership Trainee

After moving to Canada, we thought we would eventually move back to Iran. That was 15 years ago. My husband was able to complete his Ph.D. in electrical engineering at the University of Waterloo and we now live in North West Waterloo with our two Canadian-born children. My husband is a research professor in the University of Waterloo and I am a clinical Manager in ACCQ Sleep Clinic.

That first year in Waterloo was a difficult one. My brother died just two days before we left Iran and very soon after my mother got cancer. After leaving my homeland, my career—I was a physician in Iran—my family and with very little English, I must admit I was homesick.

To top it all off, we arrived at Waterloo on a very cold January day. While Iran has cold winters, they are nothing compared to what we get in Canada. One night we missed the last bus from the University to our house. It was just a 20-minute walk, but the freezing cold made it felt like an eternity. That first year was very difficult; I had to find a way to be strong and move on, and I did. Weather aside, what conquered us was the kindness Canadians spread. We also received a lot of support from the Iranian community. They helped us succeed in our new community. This is one of the most important roles of ethno-cultural groups. To support and facilitate a smooth transition and adaptation of immigrants to their new country.

Over time we embraced the idea of living in Canada so much that we became Canadian citizens in 2011. Canada has an impressive social and economic justice and equality system which has led to a healthy and diverse society. Those are qualities that many countries in the world do not have, even though they are older and have longer histories. Canada is a country of opportunities. By building a multicultural and diverse society, it is becoming a stronger nation ever day. Now that we are settled and have found our way in Canada, it is time to pay back and start helping others so I started looking at community leadership training opportunities. Currently, I am on placement with the Immigration Partnership from the KW Counselling Leadership Development Program, contributing to the mission of settlement, integration and community involvement of immigrants in Waterloo Region.
Finding affordable housing is a critical challenge for immigrants. The Settle Steering Group (SSG) will therefore celebrate landlords who are part of the solution with the 2019 Newcomer Landlord Award. The Award, now in its fourth year, will be presented at the Waterloo Region National Housing Day celebration. It recognizes landlords that provide innovative, flexible, caring and affordable housing solutions and seeks to inspire others to be part of the solution as well. See the stories of past award winners at: www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/landlordaward.

SSG partners explored how child developmental services in Waterloo Region serve newcomers and how to build stronger community connections. Partners continue to promote the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) / KW Multicultural Centre (KWMC) Medical Interpretation Program in which doctors and other health providers can access free interpretation to provide better health services for immigrants and refugees in the Waterloo Region area.

This summer several partners reflected on what we learned from the 2015-2016 Syrian refugee welcome process and what that means for the way we work now.

Work

The Work Steering Group (WSG) has had a busy fall line-up. We partnered with the Community Employment and Literacy Committee (CELC) Annual Employer Recognition Awards Breakfast to recognize employers intentionally hiring immigrants. WSG partnered with New Horizon’s Media to bring the first Immigrant Business Expo to Waterloo Region, which encouraged and supported immigrants to start and build their own businesses. Hopefully this will be the first of many similar events.

In early October, Immigration Partnership hosted immigrants and refugees on a bus tour as part of the Workforce Planning Board’s Manufacturing Day Facility Tour, where they learned about employment opportunities and the work culture and met potential employers. That month WSG also collaborated on a Human Resource Professional Association (HRPA) event where an expert panel spoke to HR professionals on hiring immigrants as a solution to the talent crisis.

WSG was also preparing for several upcoming events including Communitech’s Tech Jam and a Workforce Planning Board Part-time Career Expo. WSG continued to develop plans for a one-stop Immigrant Talent Hub, surveying employers to get feedback and ideas on how to attract, engage and recruit immigrant talent in Waterloo Region. Stay tuned as we move through that process.
Belong

National and local public opinion research shows a polarization in public support towards immigration, so this summer the Belong Steering Group (BSG) and Reception House offered an Immigration Myths and Facts presentation. The Public Education Working Group is exploring how to build on the presentation and offer it more widely. The Working Group began organizing the third edition of the Waterloo Region Global Migration Film Festival, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). From November 28 to December 18, together with local partners, films on various aspects of immigration will be screened across the region. We hope you will join us! For more information or to host a screening, visit: https://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/en/business-opportunities/film_festival.aspx.

In August, the Social Inclusion Working Group hosted the second Waterloo Region Multicultural Connections Forum at the Kitchener Market. The group continued to discuss how to empower ethno-cultural groups in Waterloo Region and the Ontario Central Chinese Cultural Centre, Shamrose for Syrian Culture and Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo shared their growth and development journeys with participants.
On September 17, the City of Cambridge hosted the first ever Newcomer Day in Waterloo Region. It was a beautiful day that started with a Community Citizenship Ceremony at the Cambridge Centre for the Arts where 31 new citizens from 10 countries officially joined the Canadian family. The celebration continued until early evening with an information fair, performances, food vendors and activities. Massive thanks to the City of Cambridge for leading and sending a clear message of inclusion and belonging to newcomers in Cambridge.

**Partnership-wide**

On the strong and responsive systems and policy front, the Immigration Partnership worked to strengthen the immigration focus in municipal strategic plans by providing collective written submissions and participating in community consultations. The Immigration Partnership Council delegated to the Councils of Kitchener, North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich with a focus on raising immigration awareness and deepening relationships with area municipalities.

During the federal election, IP surveyed local candidates on immigration topics and shared the responses widely. Partners like the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries also included the questions in their all candidate meetings. These efforts let candidates know that immigration is an important matter of policy and help to inform voting in the Region.

On the collective learning front, the Immigration Matters survey was a resounding success. Due to incredible engagement of IP partners, over the summer almost 1,100 immigrants and refugees shared experiences of accessing services and living in Waterloo Region – that’s five times bigger than IP’s 2017 survey. The results are being analysed and disaggregated and will be shared widely in the Fall to inform decision-making, program planning, policy action and community learning and reflection.

IP also planned for its fall forum on Immigration and the Economy, in partnership with the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. The event will take place on November 13, and will bring community leaders across sectors to consider the future of immigration in Waterloo Region.
Community Events and Updates

Immigration and the Economy

An event in partnership with the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce to discuss immigration and its impact on the economy of Waterloo Region. Featuring the Hon. Perrin Beatty, President of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

When: November 13, 2019, 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Where: Delta Waterloo, 110 Erb Street W.
Details at: https://greaterkwchamber.com/networking-events/events-calendar/#id=1778&cid=325&wid=401&type=Cal

National Housing Day Celebration

Celebrate National Housing Day at an awards celebration for those who have made a difference in our community. Immigration Partnership, together with other organizations, will present the Newcomer Landlord Award.

When: November 21, 2019, 9 - 11 a.m.
Where: Knox Presbyterian Church, 50 Erb St W, Waterloo
Details at: www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/landlordaward

Waterloo Region Global Migration Film Festival

When: November 28 – December 18, 2019
Where: various locations across Waterloo Region
FREE entrance. Everyone welcome!
Details at: https://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/film_festival.aspx

Part-time Job Fair

Hosted by the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, this event will bring together employers and job-seekers with a focus on part-time employment opportunities in Waterloo Region.

When: November 28, 2019, 3 - 6 p.m.
Where: The Inn of Waterloo, 475 King Street North, Waterloo
Details at: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/part-time-job-expo-tickets-74147883315

New to Waterloo Region?

Check out the Immigration Waterloo Region calendar (www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/calendar) and get weekly updates about upcoming immigrant and refugee-focused programs and events at www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/subscribe.