Nothing for us without us. This principle espouses the idea that no policy, program or initiative should be decided without the full and direct participation of the group(s) affected by it. It is the conviction that the people most affected by policies and programs know what is best for themselves.

At the Immigration Partnership, we hold this to be true. Our governing rules have always stated that we should be immigrant focused, by listening to and involving immigrants and refugees in every step of our collaborative work. We strive for at least one third of the people involved on our Council and committees to be immigrants and refugees. We regularly ask immigrants and refugees about their experiences and ideas for what would make their lives easier and richer in Waterloo Region. This ensures our planning and action is relevant and grounded in community.

We can always do more, and try to stay open to suggestions.

This latest issue of our Newsletter focuses on listening to newcomers’ voices. It discusses why this is so important and various ways in which newcomer voices are projected and heard in Waterloo Region. It shares insights from immigrants and refugees living in the community. It profiles programs that seek to amplify the voices of immigrants and refugees and build their capacity to lead. It also includes information about people who have immigrated to Canada and are now involved with the Immigration Partnership, as well as work being done by our partners.

We hope you enjoy this Newsletter and that you are inspired to reflect on if, how, and to what end you listen to the voices of immigrants and refugees in your life and work in Waterloo Region.

Tara Bedard
Executive Director, Immigration Partnership
Ways in Which We Listen to and Channel Newcomers’ Voices

Dan Vandevelt, Immigration Partnership

In all of our collective work, we continue to reach out to and highlight the voices of newcomers.

• The primary target of our community surveys is immigrants and refugees (with service providers, employers, and interested community members, all of whom may also be newcomers). We translate the survey into the top languages of people accessing interpretation services. More than two thirds of our survey respondents were immigrants, refugees or international students.

• Campaigns like #IamWaterlooRegion and #HireImmigrantsWR highlight the inspiring stories and contributions of immigrants and refugees to the broader community.

• The www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca website is developed for and promoted to newcomers. Newcomers were consulted in its development and it includes a translate feature allowing people to read it in over 100 languages.

• We advocate for policy and systems change based on the challenges that immigrants and refugees share with us.

We know that our greatest impact will be through working with immigrants and refugees and continuing to look for ways to hear and share their voices.

What Are Newcomers Saying in Our Community

We asked immigrants and refugees in Waterloo Region about whether they feel their voice is heard and what they would say to community leaders. This is a sample of what they shared.

We are a group of migrants from Eritrea. Some of us are secondary immigrants from Winnipeg and Alberta. [Because of scarcity of jobs] we asked some family members and they told us to move to Waterloo Region. Moving here gave us access to jobs, especially in Linamar in Guelph. There is big Eritrean community who help each other. Above all our kids have the chance to learn and not to forget their culture. Our families always live in community.

Do you feel like your voice is heard as a newcomer in Waterloo Region?

We did not get any opportunity to be heard in Waterloo Region. We have a lot of questions to ask to high officials of the region. If the newcomer voice could be heard, leaders may find solutions to the problems faced by newcomers.

What is one thing you would tell the leaders of this city, region, or country?

We would like to tell the leaders first and foremost to have available government owned houses, especially townhouses for big families. Eritrean families are big like other African and Asian families. We always scare neighbours and landlords because of our big family size; the kids make noise and disturb neighbours. We always try to minimize the noise of our kids but sometimes it is impossible and everyone is frustrated. Privately owned houses are expensive to rent. Also, health for kids in Waterloo Region is fine but older people are sometimes told to buy expensive medicine which they can not afford.
I came to Canada from Syria in January 2016. I have escaped my home because of war. It is not an easy journey and everything I thought I knew changed. The decision to separate from my children was the toughest decision I have taken during this journey.

**Do you feel like your voice is heard as a newcomer in Waterloo Region?**

[I am]... very keen on being able to reunite with my children. I have knocked on every door, and spoke with MPs, but no promises to help materialized. I do not feel my voice as a newcomer refugee is heard when it comes to this issue. However, to be fair, in other issues, such as my health, services in the community, I feel satisfied. It is important for newcomers’ voices to be heard because they are a source of richness to Canada if provided with opportunities. I like the fact that we live in a very diverse context and everybody accepts everybody. When I go to language school, I meet people from all around the world and I feel they add to my everyday life. This does not exist in many parts of the world.

My name is Jolly Bakatu. I speak languages including English and French. Before coming to Waterloo Region, I lived in Zimbabwe for 10 years. I also visited South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia. Coming to Canada was challenging as I had to face corruption. I sent emails to [the UN in] Geneva for my rescue and, thanks to God, Geneva responded in my favor and I got resettled to Canada.

**Do you feel like your voice is heard as a newcomer in Waterloo Region?**

Yes, my voice as newcomer is heard. Refugee newcomers’ voice need to be heard because they have been deprived of their basic human rights. They need you for counselling, they need you for support, and they need you for company to fill the gap caused by these unpredicted events which they had to face.

**What is one thing you would tell the leaders of this city, region, or country?**

Being able to live in a safe, secure place with my family is a wonderful turn of events for me. I will be very grateful for this, until the day I die. I also would like to say that I want my children to reunite with me. I will not settle completely until I have them come to live in Kitchener with me.

My name is Rehana Ansari. I speak languages including English and French. Before coming to Waterloo Region, I lived in Zimbabwe for 10 years. I also visited South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia. Coming to Canada was challenging as I had to face corruption. I sent emails to [the UN in] Geneva for my rescue and, thanks to God, Geneva responded in my favor and I got resettled to Canada.

**What is one thing you would tell the leaders of this city, region, or country?**

What I will tell the leaders of the region and the country is that when refugees are coming to Canada or to Waterloo Region, beside the assistance they get from you, they also deserve to hear inspirational speeches from social workers that will build and boost the self confidence as they have to embrace a new culture, learn a new language and socialize in their new environment.
My name is Juan Maya. I am from Colombia and came to Canada as a permanent resident looking for a place my kids could enjoy, where they can feel secure, and where they have good education and opportunities. One year later we still have goals to reach but, in general, we are very proud and happy to live here and to get involved step by step in the Canadian culture. Change has not been easy but I am sure that Canada is the best place to live and the expectations are huge. I am an Industrial Engineer working remotely part-time for a Mexican consulting company. I am looking for a place where I can do volunteering; to return to the community all that they have made for my family and me through our first year. I would like to meet more people and keep gaining experience by getting involved in the Canadian culture.

The process to obtain permanent residence is not easy and is much longer than planned. It was very hard to prepare ourselves to change completely our lives. Since the first day I came with my wife and daughters we were guided to make a successful settlement. To get involved in the professional world in Canada is not easy because as newcomers we need to understand very well the Canadian culture, the importance of the soft skills and work hard to make connections. I started some programs to facilitate that. I must admit that winter was one of our biggest concerns. After our first winter, the good news is that the spring really came, and we must say thanks!

Do you feel like your voice is heard as a newcomer in Waterloo Region?

I feel my voice is heard as a newcomer and I am very glad to have chosen Waterloo Region to live. It is easy to feel it when you see the efforts to promote innovation. Newcomers are an important part of that. We have fresh ideas and a variety of backgrounds and experience as well. It is very important for newcomers’ voices to be heard because we have valuable experience in our home countries that can contribute to the development of the region and country. We left behind our families and possessions pursuing a life with better opportunities for us and our children, so we have the energy and commitment to contribute to the community, working together to reach the same goals.

What is one thing you would tell the leaders of this city, region, or country?

I would tell the leaders to keep working in an inclusive country with the migrants and refugees. Canada is an example to the world. People who come to Canada can expect dignified treatment and can feel included in the community since the first day. It is a great value and is an example to other countries of the world. This inclusion has made Canada a great and diverse country, which I think is the base of its development.

“Every culture can be learned from and we need to be flexible and open to change.

— Asma Al-Wahsh (came to Canada in 2012 from Kuwait & Jordan)
Census Profile: Who are Newcomers in Waterloo Region?

Too often the rich diversity of Waterloo Region is not heard, seen, or celebrated. Many decisions are made without consulting newcomers. Many leadership boards or Councils do not reflect the diversity of who we are as a community. Almost a quarter of the residents in Waterloo Region were born elsewhere in the world. This profile shares some local data from the 2016 Census.

- 119,335 members of the Waterloo Region community are immigrants and 14,045 came in the previous five years.
- Every year almost 3,000 new permanent residents come to Waterloo Region – in addition to 3,000 to 8,000 international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants.
- Recent immigrants come from all over the world. The most significant countries of birth are: India, China, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Philippines, United States, Iran, Eritrea, and Egypt.
- Immigrants in Waterloo Region speak over 120 different languages.
- More than 40 per cent of the people that immigrated to Waterloo Region since 1980 arrived as economic immigrants, selected for their ability to contribute to the economic prosperity of Canada. Almost 30 per cent came as sponsored family members to reunite with family already in Canada and almost 30 per cent came as refugees.
- The immigrant population is growing. The proportion of immigrants in the Waterloo Region area is projected to grow to between 25 per cent and 31 per cent by 2036.¹

"Please don’t look at a newcomer and see a ‘refugee’ who needs help, just see another human being to connect with who has so much to share with you. I challenge you to start by spending just five minutes with that person. Who knows what might happen after that?"

– Adnan Nafisa (came in 2015 from Syria)

¹ Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036, January 2017

For more information see the fact sheets and reports at www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/factsheets
#HireImmigrantsWR: Promoting the Potential of Newcomers

Nora Whittington, Immigration Partnership

Immigration Partnership’s Work Steering Group (WSG) launched an immigrant employment awareness campaign in March of this year. The campaign mostly targets local employers and is meant to create a buzz around hiring immigrants and refugees.

With a shrinking workforce, we know that employers are looking at new ways of hiring and we want them to know that hiring immigrants can be part of the solution. We want them to know that Waterloo Region has some great immigrant talent – people who are innovative, hardworking, talented and keen to work in various sectors.

There have been ads on bus shelters across Waterloo Region, commercial ads on television (CTV) and a social media and poster campaign. There are two phases to this campaign – one that highlights the value of hiring immigrant talent and one that includes employers who speak out as champions with a commitment to diverse hiring.

This awareness building will continue beyond the official campaign since we know the need for employers to access talent will only continue to grow.

The Immigration Partnership is committed to helping employers find talent and helping newcomers find meaningful work. One of the greatest challenges facing employers is finding new talent. The Immigration Partnership is committed to bridging that gap.
Newcomer Programs in Waterloo Region

‘Bridging Resources’ Leadership Program

Georgina de Barros, KW Counselling Services

KW Counselling Services’ vision is a community where no one is left behind. We have developed several programs to connect with members of the community who may not use our traditional counselling services.

One example is the Bridging Resources Leadership Training program, which empowers newcomers and multicultural communities by supporting ethnocultural group activities and development.

In the training, emerging and established multicultural leaders are able to connect to each other, guest speakers and educational activities. Often, the participants have extensive experience in community development from their country of origin and use the course to bridge to employment in social services in Canada. KW Counselling Services also benefits. We learn from multicultural leaders about what their communities need and want, which informs the development of further programs and services.

In the Autumn of 2018, we will be offering the sixth training session. The class typically includes 25 participants, representing as many as 18 different ethno-cultural communities. It is free to participants, with support from United Way Waterloo Region Communities and the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation.

For more information about this program call KW Counselling at 519-884-0000 x212.

‘Promise of Partnership’ Newcomer Youth Drop-In Program

Melissa Strachan, Carizon

Carizon’s Promise of Partnership Project supports newcomers to Canada with outreach programs, group counselling for refugees, and educational workshops for community service providers.

The Promise of Partnership Project team is aware that living in a new country has its obstacles and can be especially difficult for newcomer youth. It can be particularly challenging for youth to find people who can support them and understand their experience and needs. The Promise of Partnership Project has partnered with the Waterloo Regional District School Board to provide a Newcomer Youth Drop-In program at Waterloo Collegiate Institute and Eastwood Collegiate Institute.

This program allows youth to speak to a trained team member in a safe and supportive environment, receiving help with the challenges of adjusting to Canadian life. Youth are provided the opportunity to discuss topics that are important to them and receive the type of support they feel they need at the moment. It also offers information about additional programs that could be helpful for them. The Promise of Partnership team provides newcomer youth with an outlet to express themselves and support them with their mental health, well-being, and settlement.

Newcomer youth interested in accessing the Youth Drop-In program can stop by from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday and Friday at Eastwood Collegiate Institute and Tuesdays at Waterloo Collegiate Institute. No appointment is necessary. Interpreters can be arranged if needed.

For more information about the Promise of Partnership Project visit: https://www.carizon.ca/counselling/refugees-newcomers.
Immigration Partnership People

Elizabeth Arcila, Work Steering Group member

I was born in Colombia in 1970 with an entrepreneurial spirit like my father. I started my first business at 15. I completed a law degree and got involved in other business opportunities. I worked in marketing for a multinational company and a university.

Due to political and family circumstances, I was forced to leave my country. I moved to Miami, Florida, where I worked as a real estate agent, delivered motivational seminars and launched my first book. Our situation in the USA was unstable so my family and I decided to look for protection as refugees in Canada in 2009.

I arrived in Kitchener with a lot of dreams and ideas for projects, but my first barrier was language. I attended ESL classes at St. Louis and took a course on how to start a business in Canada at The Working Centre. I took opportunities to work as a volunteer board member with the Needlewood Glen Housing Co-op, supporting English programs at the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support and with my local church.

I have seen that many newcomers struggle with their job situations so I started to deliver seminars with a few colleagues in Spanish for Hispanic entrepreneurs. The Waterloo Region Small Business Centre invited me to deliver these seminars at their location. I was able to help seminar participants to start their own business or to improve their existing business. I started a networking group in the Hispanic community for small business owners to connect and generate more business and referrals. Eventually, we created Orange Sky Enterprises to provide support for small businesses.

In my search for opportunities to help more entrepreneurs, I met Nora Whittington from Immigration Partnership and joined the Work Steering Group. By participating here, I can provide my perspective as an immigrant to its work looking at obstacles that prevent internationally trained individuals from successfully integrating into the local workforce. This experience has been very rewarding for me, and since I started to participate in the Work Pillar I have seen a lot of positive changes.

I am grateful to have received several leadership awards from the Canadian government for the programs and seminars I have provided, and for support from the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation to deliver the seminars in 2018. These opportunities motivate me to continue helping and serving our community. Now Canada is my home and I feel it in my heart. For a long time, it was impossible not to feel like crying, the lump in my throat was almost permanent, especially in meetings where I felt like saying what I was before, or what I had been, what I did, what I had lost - but was silent.

Seeing my students fulfill their dreams, participate in the launching of businesses such as garages, stores, and other new services made me feel useful to my community. Do they need me or do I need them more? Either way, if we share our knowledge and experience we can contribute to building a better community.

Jassy Narayan, Belong Steering Group member

I moved from the tropical island of St. Lucia to Canada in late October 1966. Nothing could have prepared me for the shock of a Canadian winter. In a little while, however, the bare branches of winter gave way to brave flowers seeking the sun.

I think I had internalized the value that community participation is the essence of citizenship early in my life in my birth country of Guyana. My parents and other extended family were natural leaders. They were examples to me that being involved in the community is not only a civic duty but a social obligation.
As a new Canadian, I became involved in the community through a YWCA mums and tots group held in a neighbourhood church. The facilitator was welcoming and opened so many doors for me. She encouraged me to volunteer in a daycare centre and enroll in the Conestoga College Early Childhood program. I was overwhelmed since my schooling in Guyana ended at grade 8. Another mentor from the YWCA (where I had become a board member) encouraged me to continue my education at university and actively helped me in the process.

My journey from grade 8 to a Masters of Social Work degree took more than 15 years - attending university part-time while raising my three daughters and working full time. The gratitude I feel for the generosity, kindness and encouragement from my Canadian born mentors can never be repaid. Perhaps it can only be paid forward.

Volunteering became an important component of my life. In my 52 years living in Canada I have served on several non-profit boards of directors, a church group settling refugees from Vietnam in the 1970s, as well as a founding member, president and interim Executive Director of Focus for Ethnic Women. This organization was formed in the 1980s to help women learn about the culture and practice of employment in Canada. Through this program, hundreds of women from every corner of the globe found work and were able to support their families. We created a model of intercultural board membership where Canadian born women with board experience served on the board with those of us who were new to Canada. This dynamic arrangement combined life experience with Canadian experience.

My path to being involved in the Immigration Partnership started with a local “Immigration Summit”. While research about the wellbeing of immigrants and refugees that was presented at that conference was disheartening, it led to the formation of the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN). WRIEN focused on the employment needs of immigrants and refugees and later evolved into the Immigration Partnership. With its three interconnected components of “settle, work and belong”, it gives hope in the immigrant community that these goals will transform lives. For me, the word “belong” involves an invitation to join, acceptance by others, reciprocity - the dance of giving and receiving, cultural enrichment and so much more.

Nermin Ozdemir, Settle Steering Group member

I immigrated to Canada from Turkey in 2004 with my family. I have a Masters Degree in Social Work from Wilfrid Laurier University. Currently, I am working as a Family Outreach Worker with House of Friendship.

I have more than eight years of experience working with immigrants in different settings. As an immigrant myself, I am very familiar with the challenges, opportunities and issues faced by newcomers. I faced immigration related struggles such as navigating services, housing, employment, settlement, food and more. As a Family Outreach Worker, I got involved in Immigration Partnership’s Belong Pillar in 2015 and this year I joined the Settle Pillar. Being part of the Settle Pillar is a great platform for me to build a respectful and inclusive community for immigrants.
Immigration Partnership Updates

Settle

The Settle Steering Group (SSG) has been going through transition with Pari Karem stepping down as Chair, Eliseo Martell moving into the Chair role and Laura Stoutenburg becoming the group’s new Vice-Chair. A huge thank you to Pari for her years of leadership!

We have been supporting the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) as they seek to ensure health care is provided equitably and effectively to people who may not speak English. The LHIN is initiating an interpretation model involving consistent and ready access to interpreters at local hospitals, health care provider clinics, and other health settings.

Work

The Work Steering Group (WSG) has been busy these past few months with more to come. The Communications Action Group has been busy rolling out the #HireImmigrantsWR awareness campaign. Phase one featuring available immigrant talent and exceeded the targets for employers wanting more information or supports regarding their hiring needs. Phase two featuring local employers committed to diverse hiring launched in May. The Advocacy Action Group is focusing on three priorities: Employer biases, changes within human resource education and the creation of a one-stop hub for connecting employers and immigrant/refugee talent. The Data Action Group partnered with the Workforce Planning Board’s EmployerOne Survey which gathered data from more than 550 employers on their workforce needs. The Group is planning a follow-up with nearly 250 participants that completed questions about hiring immigrants.

In addition, WSG partnered with the K-W Multicultural Centre on the 10th Annual Global Skills Conference, hosting a “Connections Hub” networking event where more than 30 employers promoted employment opportunities to over 120 immigrants in attendance. The WSG also partnered with the Community Employment and Literacy Committee (CELC) on an Employer Recognition Event in May. Immigration Partnership was excited to receive recognition for its participation in the 2017 Manufacturing Day and looks forward to participating again in Fall 2018. Through the WSG, Immigration Partnership joined forces with the Manufacturing Innovation Summit, promoting the #HireImmigrantWR campaign to local manufacturers. WSG also participated in Communitech’s Tech Jam, connecting with over 70 employers and 900 people seeking employment, many of whom were immigrants or international students, and hosted a speaker event with the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce in June. The first six months of the year have been action packed and lots of great results. WSG is always open to your ideas if you want to share.
The Belong Steering Group (BSG) has also been transitioning with Dianne Boston-Nyp becoming Chair and Elba Martinez and Minkyung Kim becoming Vice-Chairs. Thank you to Iman Arab for her leadership as Chair for the past two years.

The BSG has been working on the three actions outlined in the CAP. The Immigrant and Refugee Isolation Working Group has been planning an event in the Fall to bring together informal and formal organizations and groups to discuss social isolation among immigrant and refugee communities in Waterloo Region.

The Public Education Working Group organized the #belongtogetherWR campaign to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21. Working group members attended the Global Skills conference, the Cross Cultures event in Kitchener City Hall and the community discussion on racial discrimination at KPL to encourage residents to commit to a personal action to eliminate racism and discrimination. The campaign resulted in over 300 Waterloo Region residents – including federal, provincial and municipal political representatives, local organizations and many individuals – publicly sharing personal commitments to eliminating racial discrimination. In one day, #belongtogetherWR was mentioned over 600 times on Twitter, plus posts on Facebook and Instagram, making nearly 25,000 impressions.

On May 11, the BSG in partnership with the City of Kitchener and the Institute for Canadian Citizenship hosted a community citizenship ceremony at Kitchener City Hall Rotunda where 35 new Canadian citizens from 14 different countries took the oath of citizenship. Community partners facilitated roundtable discussions with the citizenship candidates prior to the ceremony on what it means to be Canadian, and Bridges to Belonging’s Buddy Choir sang the national anthem. Thanks to all community partners for making this event so special.

Partnership-wide

On March 1, Immigration Partnership hosted over 160 immigrant and non-immigrant community leaders and stakeholders from across Waterloo Region at its 2018 Immigration Forum to discuss the changing immigration context in Canada and how we as a community want to position ourselves and benefit.

We participated in a consultation with the federal government on Canada’s citizenship guide, encouraging the development of the guide and the citizenship process itself as a tool to foster belonging among new citizens.

In the lead-up to the Ontario election in June, Immigration Partnership undertook a number of actions to raise the profile of immigration matters on the agenda of election candidates in Waterloo Region, encourage their commitment, and create opportunities to share their views with voters on important immigration questions to consider when casting ballots.
Community Events and Updates

Kultrún World Music Festival
Kultrún is a free, family-friendly celebration of diversity featuring local, national and international world music, all-ages interactive activities, workshops by professional artists, performance art and a food, craft and art market. For more information visit: https://www.kultrunwmf.com.
When: July 14-15
Where: Victoria Park, Kitchener

LINK Picnic Festival
LINK Picnic Festival is a celebration of African and Caribbean culture with music, dancing, drumming, carnival parade and activities for children. For more information visit: http://linkpicnicfestival.com.
When: August 25-26
Where: Victoria Park, Kitchener

I have learned that where you find yourself is your community and you need to invest in that present.
– Scilla Owusu-Amoah (2010 from Ghana)

Subscribe to the Immigration Waterloo Region community calendar
Get weekly updates about upcoming immigrant and refugee-focused programs, forums and events at: www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/calendar