SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK

INTENTIONAL CONNECTION

Improving Settlement for Privately Sponsored Refugees in Ontario through Settlement-Sponsor Collaboration

Allies for Refugee Integration (ARI), a collaboration of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Refugee 613
Ontario, Various Locations

Area of Practice:

- Developing Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations to Provide Supports for Immigrant Settlement and Integration
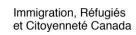- Information and Orientation

Video:
https://youtu.be/2a74ul7-Dkk

A Pathways to Prosperity Project

June 2021

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada

VOIES VERS LA PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

OCASI was formed in 1978 to act as a collective voice for immigrant-serving agencies in Ontario. OCASI coordinates responses to shared needs and concerns, with a membership of more than 200 community-based organizations in the province of Ontario.

Refugee 613 is an agile and innovative communications hub that informs, connects, and inspires people to welcome refugees and build strong communities. Refugee 613 began its work during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 in Ottawa. It began with the support of a coalition of more than 30 partners led by local settlement, health, and private sponsorship experts.

OCASI and Refugee 613 partnered to work on the Allies for Refugee Integration (ARI) project. The goal of the ARI project is to increase and strengthen the collaboration between settlement service providers and refugee sponsorship groups in Ontario and ultimately improve settlement outcomes of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). The practice entitled 'Intentional Connection' is a pilot practice developed by the ARI project.

The impetus for this practice emerged from research conducted by the ARI project showing that many sponsors and sponsored refugees were unaware of settlement services, leading to less uptake of IRCC-funded services and a more frustrating experience for sponsors. The research also found that settlement workers and sponsors are too often either duplicating roles or not collaborating, leading to sponsors re-creating settlement services within their group, service provider organizations (SPOs) excluding sponsors from discussions where their insights could be valuable, and newcomers caught between the two most important supports. The current practice addresses this gap by exploring the role division between sponsors and settlement providers and by focusing on pre-arrival settlement planning to ensure awareness of services among sponsors and sponsored refugees.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:
Intentional Connection

Description:
The practice 'Intentional Connection' focuses on two time points in the settlement process of a PSR: immediately before and after the arrival of the PSR. During the (virtual) pre-arrival meeting, sponsors and a settlement worker connect with each other to set expectations and provide sponsors with resources, focusing on role division. When the sponsored refugee arrives, the (virtual) post-arrival meeting intentionally connects the newcomer, sponsors, and settlement worker to ensure that the connection to settlement services is complete. This is a step further than the usual intake process that settlement workers conduct with clients. In particular, it brings in the sponsor representative (and the sponsorship agreement holder (SAH), if appropriate) as an equal partner in supporting the settlement journey of the sponsored refugee. It is important to note that while not defined as a full "model" or "program", the practice is a suggested set of changes to existing processes that greatly improve the uptake of services and successful sponsorship of PSRs.

Goal(s):
The goals of the practice 'Intentional Connection' are: a) to increase awareness of community and other settlement resources among sponsors and sponsored refugees, b) to improve settlement providers' and sponsors' understanding of roles and responsibilities, c) to engage partners and stakeholders involved in settlement to implement strategies that address newcomers' needs, and d) to provide services that are responsive to the needs of newcomers.

Target Client Group(s):
The target client groups include PSRs, refugee sponsors, and settlement workers.

Delivery Partners:
The practice was pilot-tested in partnership with the following organizations:

- The YMCA of Three Rivers
- Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario
- The YMCA of Southwestern Ontario
- Diocese of London Refugee Ministries
- Catholic Crosscultural Services

Human Resources:
The practice was piloted in three locations across Ontario (GTA, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Windsor) for 4-12 months. Each location implemented and tested the model in different ways that worked best for their internal goals, structure, and location. In general, each pilot site implemented the pilot with the support of a pilot lead, 1-3 settlement workers working part-time on the project, and the support of other partners such as SAH staff, external partnerships, and coordination support from the project coordinators at ARI.

Funding:
The practice was developed through Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) funding by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Funding was received for a three-year period, ending in June 2021.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:
The practice contributes to a more effective settlement process for PSRs, and may increase the likelihood of repeat sponsorships. The practice accomplishes this by bringing together SPOs, SAHs and sponsors to share information and tools, create partnerships, coordinate effort and build a community of support. Furthermore, by recognizing the importance of having a pre-arrival and post-arrival meeting, the practice facilitates timely knowledge sharing and the alignment of sponsor and settlement worker action to support the settlement of PSRs.

Efficient:
The practice is efficient because it builds on the existing strengths and expertise of SAHs and SPOs and enables mutual learning and knowledge transfer between organizations. For example, SPOs can build on sponsors' insights into PSR needs for more responsive service delivery, and SAHs can learn

about existing services and up-to-date information on settlement best practices. Furthermore, the practice relies on a dedicated settlement worker as a single point of contact through which PSRs continue to access settlement support, and through which sponsors access the tools and information needed to more effectively help PSRs successfully navigate the settlement system. Finally, the model allows for flexibility in the frequency and duration of contact between the settlement worker and sponsors, depending on the needs of each case.

Relevant:
The practice increased PSRs' and sponsors' awareness of existing settlement services and other community resources. Furthermore, the fact that a single case worker served as the point of contact for PSRs from the moment of their arrival helped PSRs to access the services they needed. Settlement workers reported satisfaction with the practice as they could more easily assess the needs of the newcomer, be more responsive, and find an ally in sponsors to navigate potential gaps in support. Finally, the partnerships and open communication between settlement organizations and SAHs helped to create a smoother settlement experience and benefits for newcomers with complex cases.

Sustainable:
Existing funding for this model is no longer available through the ARI project, and not all SPOs and SAHs can take on the practice in its entirety with existing funding. However, all pilot sites will continue to carry on some of the key learnings and practices regardless of funding as they see the importance of this work. Furthermore, there are also a few small changes that could be made by all SAHs and SPOs regardless of additional funding or support. For example, sponsors could be included in existing orientations to services, and formalized agreements could be created to cooperate with SAHs. ARI shared policy recommendations based on this practice with IRCC and hopes that IRCC will continue to provide funding to build upon and sustain the practice.

Transferable:
The practice was pilot tested in both large and medium sized cities in Ontario suggesting that it may be replicated in other, similar cities. Furthermore, ARI developed a number of recommendations to other agencies and to IRCC about how they could put this model into practice, in part or in whole. In terms of the recommendations provided to IRCC, ARI recommended providing institutional and financial support for the building of formal SPO-SAH partnerships as well as for the performance of the activities that constitute the practice (e.g., sponsor and PSR referrals, pre-arrival and post-arrival meetings, provision of services and support by a settlement worker).

Innovative and Forward Thinking:
The process used to develop the practice was innovative. In particular, the development of the practice was evidence-based and included several stakeholders and partners who worked together to test different strategies to improve PSR integration. Furthermore, the practice is flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of sponsors and newcomers. Instead of being reactive to a crisis or dependent on the newcomer to search out support, it is a proactive approach that connects newcomers to services and a community of support. Several features of the practice contribute to its success. These include, among others, the timing of the practice in the settlement process (pre-arrival and post-arrival meetings), the designation of a settlement worker who also speaks the language of the PSR as a single point of contact, and warm referrals from SAHs to SPOs (i.e., SAHs contact SPOs to connect clients with a settlement worker who then follows up with the clients to get information

on the case). Warm referrals ensure continuity of support and increase the likelihood that sponsors and newcomers extend the trust and goodwill they have built with SAHs to SPOs.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:
This practice is unique mostly in its wraparound approach to connecting newcomers proactively to existing services and ensuring all their supports, including sponsors, are on the same page from the very beginning. The practice builds on the strengths of existing practices of orientation and case management of newcomer clients, but with more intentional collaboration built in as needed.

High Client Uptake:
During the pilot of the practice, SAHs referred sponsors and PSRs to SPOs. In the future, most SPOs and SAHs who participated in the pilot will continue to work together for referrals. Also, SPOs may choose to do outreach to Groups of Five (private sponsorship groups) in their community to offer support. Feedback from newcomers shows that newcomers appreciated the extra support from settlement workers and felt less isolated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participating newcomers reported that the meetings were filling their information needs, they better understood what they could expect from settlement, and that they were getting the information they needed (e.g., language assessment, referrals for employment and Canada Child Tax Benefit). All newcomers recommended the practice to be scaled up to benefit other newcomers.

High Client Retention:
No evaluation data were collected to assess client retention over a long period of time or beyond the pilot testing phase which only lasted a few months in some cases.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:
The practice was tested with 23 sponsor groups, 68 PSRs and five settlement workers who directly participated in the pilot activities. In addition, over 153 settlement workers were trained on the PSR program and on how to work with PSRs. From the perspective of PSRs, the pilot had a valuable impact on sponsors, who were more informed and able to provide support as a result of their participation. Also, PSRs and sponsors highlighted the value of connecting to a dedicated settlement worker with knowledge of their case. PSRs also appreciated the clarity that the settlement worker brought to planning and executing settlement-related tasks, and the clear division of responsibilities among all involved. Sponsors also reported a reduction in the effort and stress associated with sponsorship as a result of SPO support.

From the perspective of settlement workers, the practice led to great efficiencies by connecting with sponsors and PSRs immediately on arrival. Settlement workers also found that the practice contributed to more open, productive, and stronger sponsor-PSR relationships. Pilot agencies stated that the pilot increased access to settlement information and services for PSRs and sponsors, and reduced duplication of effort between sponsors and settlement workers. Pilot SPOs also found that the practice led to more tailored service provision and noted that their institutional agreements with SAHs resulted in mutually beneficial communication and coordination. All SPOs and SAHs who engaged in the pilot intend to continue to collaborate post-pilot. Similarly, all settlement workers and pilot agencies unequivocally stated that the practice should be scaled up.

Overall, the practice achieved its intended short-term outcomes. It created awareness among sponsors and PSRs about community and other settlement resources, it engaged partners and stakeholders and implemented strategies to address newcomer needs, and it delivered services that were responsive to the needs of newcomers and communities.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The practice was evaluated by OCASI and Refugee 613 staff in collaboration with external evaluation consultants at Logical Outcomes. In 2019, a logic model and key indicators for successful implementation were developed. ARI staff also worked with each of the pilot agencies to develop an evaluation framework that could be easily integrated into the agencies' evaluation routines. Several tools were used to measure indicators, such as online surveys with sponsors and settlement workers, in-depth interviews with newcomers and key stakeholders, as well as data tracked by settlement workers. In addition, each pilot site wrote bi-monthly reports and participated in follow-up meetings to capture data such as the impacts of the pilot on each stakeholder as well as challenges and successes of the implementation of the practice. Some of the outcomes that were tracked to assess the impact of the practice include the following: increased evidence of more effective or efficient service delivery models, enhanced communication and collaboration between sponsors and settlement workers, increased knowledge about client populations/population-specific needs, and enhanced engagement of new and existing partners. Importantly, evaluation data were collected at every step of the practice. Also, since 2020, evaluation findings and feedback were shared back with the pilot sites to make adjustments to the pilots.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ARI Website
https://ocasi.org/allies-refugee-integration

ARI Final Report
http://bit.ly/ARI-final-report