



Connecting refugees with lower English fluency to employment

David Lee
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MOSAIC

Who is MOSAIC?



VISION

Together we advance an inclusive and thriving Canada



MISSION

MOSAIC enriches communities through services and advocacy, furthering the success and sense of belonging of newcomers and individuals from diverse backgrounds.



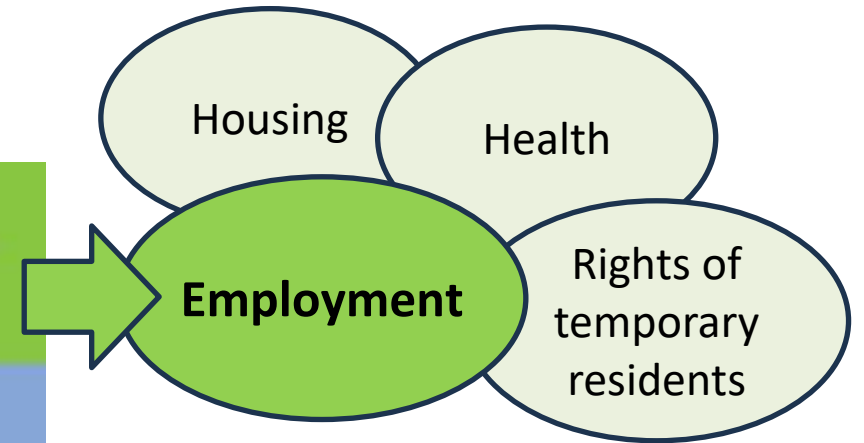
Where we are

MOSAIC operates on traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territories, the ancestral lands of the sḵwx̱wú7mesh, sel í'l w' itulh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, qíqéyt, kwíkwəłəm, q'ícəy', q'wá:n'ł'ən, SEMYOME, S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), Stz'uminus, WSÁNEĆ and Matsqui nations.

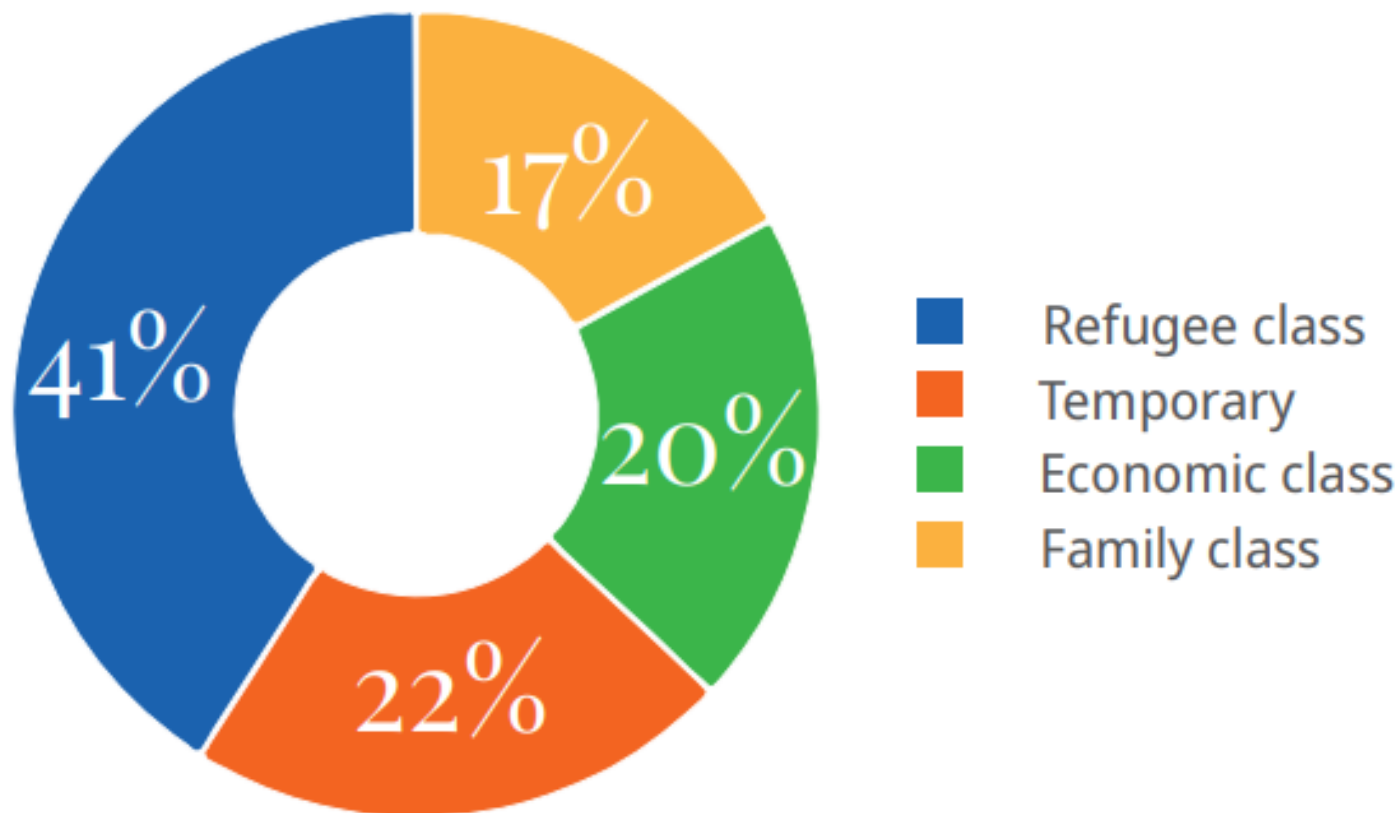


Advancing access to employment is a priority

MOSAIC's Strategic Pillars



Who MOSAIC serves (our clients)



Who MOSAIC serves (our clients)

Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons in-Canada	
Eritrea	15,675
Afghanistan	9,970
Syria	6,775
Somalia, Democratic Republic of	5,130
Ethiopia	3,185
Percent of Total	53.1%

Source: 2025 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration

Supporting Tigrinya-speaking refugees to employment

- In 2024, MOSAIC's settlement team identified over 800 Tigrinya-speaking privately-sponsored refugees
 - 60 percent of them requested employment support
- A significant proportion of these clients have lower levels of English fluency.
 - Survey of a cohort of 30 Tigrinya-speaking clients actively seeking employment, 18 self-reported to have little or basic level of English only (60 percent).

Most were not able to secure employment or access employment programs and services due to their level of English



How we approached this program design



- Funding and client-centred design training and support through the Future Skills Centre.
- Overall timeline was 6 months (April through October).
- MOSAIC's Employment team worked in close collaboration with our Settlement and Interpretation & Translations teams to conduct focus groups to hear directly from Tigrinya-speaking clients.
- Connected with employers to identify opportunities to address barriers in their recruitment and hiring processes.



Program Arc

Session	Session Date
Orientation Session	April 8
In-Person 2-Day Workshop	April 29 & 30
Session 1: Developing a Problem Statement	June 3, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 2: Stakeholder & Systems Mapping	June 17, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 3: Experience Maps & Personas	July 3, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 4: Research Insights	July 15, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 5: Ideation & Desired Future State	July 29, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 6: Prototype Development 1	August 12, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 7: Prototype Development 2 & Theory of Change	August 26, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 8: Creating an Implementation Plan	September 16, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 9: Developing a Pitch	September 30, 1-2:30 PM ET
Session 10: Pitch	October 14, 1-2:30 PM ET

Understanding our clients through focus groups

- Research ethics
- Translation and interpretation support
- 4 to 6 participants
- Key questions/topics:
 - Type of employment they are interested in
 - What's been helpful to them
 - Biggest challenges and barriers
 - Supports and services wished for



Persona 1 Prototype: Semere

Background & Characteristics:

Semere is 40, originally from Eritrea. He lived in Israel and worked in construction and informal trades for some time. He holds a technical diploma but doesn't have recognized credentials in Canada. He speaks some English (CLB 4), enough to get by, but not enough for skilled employment or retraining programs that require higher fluency.



Age: 40

Occupation: Former skilled tradesperson

Education: Technical college (unrecognized)

Values: Stability, independence, pride in skilled work

I've never gone through a formal employment process before – resumes, interviews, applying – it's all new. Completing all these forms is intimidating.

Needs:

- Pathway to recognize or build on past experience
- Access to basic certifications (e.g., WHMIS, FoodSafe) with interpretation
- Intro to the Canadian job search, application process and work culture

Goals:

- Re-enter the workforce in a role aligned with his past skills
- Support his family and become financially stable

Challenges:

- Excluded from bridging programs due to English threshold
- Lack of trust (to communities as well)
- Feels forced into survival jobs unrelated to his experience
- Pressure: of being one of the caregiver/home maker at home, so finding a job is crucial here

Persona 2 Prototype: Miriam

Background & Characteristics:

Miriam is 30 and recently resettled. She completed some education in her home country (grade 8) and never had formal employment. She's eager to learn and contribute but feels intimidated by job search processes and uncertain about where to begin. She speaks English at CLB 4.

Needs:

- Step-by-step career orientation
- Pre-employment training (resume writing, interviews)

Goals:

- Gain first job in customer service or early childhood sector
- Explore further training or education options



Age: 30

Occupation: None, never employed

Education: Completed Grade 8 (home country)

Values: Dignity, learning, structure

It's difficult for me to look for a job because I'm expected to stay home and take care of my husband and family. But we need more income.

Challenges:

- Lacks confidence and practical experience
- Overwhelmed by job market expectations and application systems
- Pressure: cultural pressure of getting married and starting a family

Persona 3 Prototype: Yonas

Background & Characteristics:

Yonas is 22 and arrived through refugee sponsorship. He didn't complete high school and has no diploma but is eager to learn and work. He participated in a short training program but did not pass due to his level of English and digital literacy. He speaks English at <CLB 4 and responds well to supportive, structured environments.



It's not just language, it's trauma and fear of looking stupid in front of others.

Needs:

- Access to basic training and mentorship
- Clear path to first job and eventually high school equivalency

Goals:

- Start working in a warehouse, retail, or construction
- Work toward high school equivalency or trades program

Age: 22

Occupation:

Unemployed/ training participant

Education: Grade 9-10, no diploma

Values: Independence, teamwork, hands-on learning

Challenges:

- Doesn't understand job market systems or credentials
- Easily discouraged without mentorship or peer support
- Pressure: of wanting to be independent from his family, and sponsor that brought him here.

Additional insights from focus groups

MOSAIC and the government should hold sessions like this once or twice a month, so we share our experiences and find solutions together.

I want someone to lead me how to proceed. Where to go for training, where to upgrade. I didn't get that information.

The shortest way would be through job training. If we mix with society on the job, we can learn English better than only language classes.



BEFORE YOU COME TO CANADA

2-3 weeks before arrival
All CLB levels



WHEN YOU ARE IN CANADA

0-4 weeks after arrival
All CLB levels



GETTING READY TO FIND A JOB

3-4 weeks
CLB 3-4



GETTING A JOB

4-32 weeks
CLB 4-5



AFTER YOU GET A JOB

24-52 weeks after getting the job
CLB 5+



BEFORE YOU COME TO CANADA

2-3 weeks before arrival
All CLB levels

Specific orientation workshop for sponsors (closer to arrival of clients who come to Canada in the next 2 months)

Welcome videos and checklists for Refugees waiting to come to Canada

WHEN YOU ARE IN CANADA

0-4 weeks after arrival
All CLB levels

Info session for newcomers, Welcome package including checklist

English assessment

Register for LINC assessment

Immediate referral of LINC4 clients to WorkBC Centers with a warm hand-off/liaison

Conversation circle for CLB4 and below while waiting for LINC

Book club for CLB4+ while waiting for LINC

Series of community tours: *Basic Life Skills* (bank, library, supermarket etc.)

GETTING READY TO FIND A JOB

3-4 weeks
CLB 3-4

Client intake interviews to assess their needs and suitability/readiness for programs

Visual map of the overall employment journey/action plan

Canadian Workplace culture/motivation workshops

Basic Life and Essential Work Skills workshops

Basic Computer Skills/Digital Literacy skills workshop

English Language asynchronous program for people who are unable to access services due to commitments at home

GETTING A JOB

4-32 weeks
CLB 4-5

Core Workshops:

Mock Interviews
Resume Writing
Cover Letter Writing
Labour Law & Employee rights

Training:

- Cohort-based training program designed to meet in-demand entry level jobs that require basic English
- STOC Training
- Workplace English
- Practicum
- Interview with Employer
- Participants are paired to support each other throughout training
- Extra support provided by Native Speaker to increase success of completing certification

Volunteering

For those who do not have sufficient work experience or do not want to be in the cohort training

Wage Subsidy

Work Experience for English proficient participants

Support

On-site visits from job developers and follow-ups during work experience

Job Search

Employer Partnerships

AFTER YOU GET A JOB

24-52 weeks after getting the job
CLB 5+

Regular touchpoints with a case manager to provide ongoing guidance and support (at 4, 24, and 52 weeks)

Support clients to continue evening LINC classes to improve English while working

Scaling and limitations

- Better integration across settlement, language and employment services by mapping the clients' experience and journey
- Investment in cross-team learning and process improvement
- Human relationships across teams and within client communities are critical
- Integrated systems view by funders and partners



Recommendations

Program/service level

- Regular meetings across employment, language and settlement teams (co-locate if possible!)
- First learn from and about each other and then develop a shared perspective
- Start small and focused

Systems/policy level

- Take time to understand the priorities, constraints and context of our funders
- Share the clients' experiences and stories to highlight the barriers and unintended consequences, and opportunities
- Identify specific initiatives to address barriers with options

