MOVING FROM HELPING TO RECIPROCITY
Creating Inclusive Programs to Build Relationships between Long-Term Community Members and Newcomers

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IN COLLABORATION WITH
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Moving from Helping to Reciprocity:
Inclusive Programs to Build Relationships between Long-Term Community Members and Newcomers

Given Canada's growing immigration targets and expanded humanitarian commitments, developing effective means of building strong relationships between newcomers and long-term community members is more important than ever before. As the social justice and human rights movements of the past few years have taught us, communities are only as inclusive as their least included members. We created this report with the hope of contributing to efforts to create an environment in which all people (regardless of immigration status, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability) are welcomed, respected, and engaged.

This document presents recommendations for community programs that are designed to foster relationships between newcomers and long-term community members. Individuals with immigrant and refugee backgrounds (“newcomers”) should feel welcomed and valued in their new community. They should also feel that they belong and can contribute. Fostering inclusion for newcomers as full community members requires an integrated effort from local organizations and individual community members.

The recommendations in this brief report are based on interviews that were conducted with
- Professionals (such as those who work in the settlement community)
- Long-term community members (those who consider themselves established residents, regardless of birthplace), and
- Newcomers (recent refugees)

The interviews asked about people’s perspectives on how programs and events in the community could help promote meaningful relationships between newcomers and long-term community members. Each recommendation is presented alongside questions to consider while planning and delivering an event or program.

These recommendations for inclusive programming exist alongside equally important efforts toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge the added complexities of welcoming newcomers to resettle on stolen land. Thus, we urge anyone involved in resettlement efforts to take personal actions towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and to teach newcomers to Canada the historical and contemporary practices and culture of Indigenous peoples.
Here’s a strength-based piece for people who are newcomers - they are not coming as a blank state, they have skills, they have strengths, they have things to offer.

So if they’re thinking “Oh, I could offer this.” “I could teach this....” And then I am looking at the other side, “Oh this is what I have to offer this family,” so that has a chance to make things a little more equal.

– Long-Term Community Member
Is it clear that long-term community members benefit from being involved in welcoming newcomers?

Long-term community members should be encouraged to reflect on what they gain from participation, such as cultural learning, broadened social networks, and pride in their community. Advertisement for events or programs that involve newcomers often try to motivate long-term community members to participate out of compassion and a desire to help the less fortunate. Compassion and caring towards newcomers is essential. But emphasizing only the vulnerability of newcomers can create unequal relationships. Reciprocal relationships, in which each person benefits, are more rewarding for everyone.

Promotional materials that highlight the growth and learning opportunities for long-term community members, in addition to the benefits to newcomers, would create greater mutuality in relationships. The goal is to shape motivations for participation towards equality and shared humanity instead of “saviorism” and “othering.” Highlighting the gains for long-term community members showcases newcomer strengths, and also supports the development of meaningful relationships built on shared interests, mutual learning, and growth.

It shouldn’t be “I am doing this because he needs help.” This is not what it is about. But maybe I’ve been here for a long time, so how open am I to new experiences, to trying something different, to stepping outside my comfort zone, to really understand other sides?

– Long-Term Community Member

The [newcomer] family can learn the Canadian side, we can learn the culture. The more the Canadians learn the other culture, the more it is good for them too. It breaks down some of the biases that people have. – Professional

Are we creating accessible environments for all participants?

Collaboration is easier when participants are comfortable with their environment and each other. Meeting in spaces that are convenient or already used by newcomers will be more comfortable and accessible, such as schools and community centers. Programming that minimizes language requirements also reduces barriers.
2. Include Everyone in Planning the Event or Program

Are we including newcomers in event or program planning from the start?

Involving everyone in planning, including newcomers, is an inclusive practice because it promotes true belonging. Having a planning committee with both newcomers and long-term community members allows everyone a chance to use their experience and perspectives to shape the program so that all interests and preferences are represented. Also, including all voices early on communicates that everyone has the capacity and power to create the event or program, everyone belongs, and everyone is responsible.

“We used to throw things together and say ‘Oh the community will come if we create it,’ but that’s not the way it always works. We always want to talk to who we are trying to serve to find out if this is going to be a benefit to you and if you would like to do it. – Professional

(It should be a centre of workers who are from different cultures. Because if they are all Canadian, they will do something closer to their culture, if they are all refugee, they will do something closer to their culture, the view won’t be clear to every single family) – Newcomer
3. Promote Reflection on Biases and Motivations Prior to the Event or Program

☐ Are we encouraging long-term community members to reflect and identify their assumptions and stereotypes?

Assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and preconceived expectations may block genuine connections, which could lead to exclusion, “othering,” or microaggressions. Everyone is affected by biases due to how newcomers are portrayed in media (as fragile) and how Canadians are portrayed (as helpers/rescuer/do-gooder). These biases maintain power differentials between newcomers and long-term community members. Encouraging reflection among long-term community members before events on why they are participating, what they expect from newcomers, and how to reduce power dynamics may encourage equality and prevent prejudice from interfering in the formation of new relationships.

“Really recognizing that each person, each family comes with an entirely different story and background and culture and expectation and experiences. So really staying open, and listening, and asking questions, and not really making any assumptions. – Professional”
PART TWO: Details to Consider Regarding the Event or Program

4. Engage in Shared Activities

Do participants have an activity to do together?

Relationships are easier to form when there is an activity to do together, like food sharing or sports. A shared activity often creates an equal playing field, as everyone participates together, and reduces the power differences that are often part of newcomer programming. The common bonding point of a shared activity can also buffer against the awkwardness of not knowing what to talk about.

Activity-based events can also minimize self-consciousness related to language abilities. Shared activities such as soccer/football, art, gardening, or cooking reduce the pressure to talk. In addition, engaging in these types of activities provides a concrete focus for sharing language, which could help participants navigate language differences and make it easier to form relationships. Including community members who speak multiple languages can ease interactions for all parties.
6. Include Children and Youth

☐ How can we include children and youth to make events accessible for families?

Including children and youth opens events up to families and gives parents a common point to bond over. Programs that are based in places where families naturally go are more accessible. While kids participate in activities, parents have an opportunity to focus on building relationships with each other. Child-focused activities may make interactions feel more natural or authentic to participants. Further, including children and youth reduces barriers to participation that may otherwise exist due to a lack of childcare.

"By watching the kids, it was much easier... for the adults to interact or to find things to do together, ways to connect."

– Long-Term Community Member
Food is a natural gathering point across cultures. Activities in which participants cook together, or share homemade dishes, ease the pressure on interactions and allow all parties to ‘bring something to the table.’

7. Center Event Around Food

- How can we involve the sharing of food?

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8. Accommodate Gender Preferences

- Are we inclusive of various preferences regarding gendered events?

Different gender customs may limit the types of events that people are comfortable attending. For example, individuals with distinct cultural norms surrounding mixed-gender activities may not be comfortable in certain contexts. Accessibility can be achieved through including gender diverse perspectives and by being conscious of preferences for single-gender or gender-inclusive spaces.

I think it would be nice to have families get together and make a meal together. I think there’s just something so special about food and making food together so I think that would be really cool to have families come together and make food.

– Professional
PART THREE: Helping to Reciprocity Inclusive Program Checklist

These guidelines were created in consultation with community members for creating inclusive programming by celebrating what everyone has to contribute. The first three points address considerations for before the event or program, and the following five address the event or program itself.

1. Promote a Collaborative Spirit of Equal Power and Respect
   - Are we facilitating the engagement of newcomers and long-term community members as equals?
   - Is it clear that long-term community members benefit from being involved in welcoming newcomers?
   - Are we creating accessible environments for all participants?

2. Include Everyone in Planning the Event or Program
   - Are we including newcomers in program planning from the start?

3. Promote Reflection on Biases and Motivations Prior to the Event or Program
   - Are we encouraging long-term community members to reflect and identify their assumptions and stereotypes?

4. Engage in Shared Activities
   - Do participants have an activity to do together?

5. Be Mindful of Language Differences
   - How can we minimize language requirements?

6. Include Children and Youth
   - How can we include children and youth to make events accessible for families?

7. Center Event Around Food
   - How can we involve the sharing of food?

8. Accommodate Gender Preferences
   - Are we inclusive of various preferences regarding gendered events?