CANADIAN DIVERSITY

PATHWAYS TO INNOVATION AND INCLUSION

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LETTERS

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FOREWORD

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For decades we have seen labour market growth in Canada come from immigration. We can also see the richness and vibrancy that immigrants bring to cities like Toronto, where half the population was born outside of Canada while another 25% are children of immigrants. Canada is recognized globally for its innovative approaches to harnessing diverse talent and for providing unparalleled social mobility and groundbreaking efforts to create pathways for immigrants and refugees. Yet in spite of the accolades we receive internationally, we know we can do better on this front. We know that immigrants brought to Canada based on our assessment of their skills may still face barriers preventing them from using those skills. We know that many of our training and employment programs – particularly language training – are not producing the results we need. And we also know that employers can be doing much more to create workplaces that attract and retain newcomers.

This special issue of *Canadian Diversity* examines critical issues related to skills and employment pathways for newcomers and racialized Canadians, particularly those most affected by COVID-19.

Led by a team of researchers at the Diversity Institute and informed by more than twenty workshops sponsored by the Future Skills Centre at the 2021 Metropolis Conference, these papers examine the challenges that we must address if Canada is going to harness the talent of newcomers and racialized peoples. These reports also highlight innovative approaches to challenging conventional wisdom in order to create a more effective and inclusive skills and employment ecosystem.

At the Future Skills Centre, we are dedicated to helping Canadians gain the skills they need to thrive in a changing labour market. We are constantly looking ahead, gaining and sharing insights into the labour market of today and the future. Based on these insights, and with our partners, we test and measure innovative approaches to skills development and training to learn what works.

Please join us in considering new ways of addressing challenges and harnessing evidence and experience to create a skills and employment ecosystem that drives prosperity and social inclusion to keep Canada as one of the most attractive destinations for the best and the brightest from around the world.

Pedro Barata
Executive Director, Future Skills Centre

EMBRACING INNOVATION FOR IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Canada prides itself in being a nation of immigrants – approximately 20% of Canadians were born outside of Canada and nearly 40% are the children of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017). In some of Canada's largest cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, the majority of the population is born outside the country and is also racialized (Statistics Canada, 2019). The Government of Canada (2020) is acutely aware of the significant role immigration has in driving economic growth, and has set ambitious immigration targets with a focus on attracting skilled migrants. Apart from our humanitarian programs targeting refugees, we focus our systems on attracting the best and the brightest from around the world through an immigration system which rewards skills and education. However, in spite of the fact that most immigrants have better levels of education than Canadian born job seekers and employees, they face high levels of unemployment and underemployment: for example, in Ontario, only 20% of internationally educated engineers are working in their field of expertise (OSPE, 2015).

> " The causes of unemployment and underemployment lie in various barriers these equity-deserving groups are facing, including systemic and individual discrimination on the part of employers, nonrecognition and devaluation of credentials and work experience obtained outside of Canada, and immigrants' lack of familiarity with Canadian work culture, and lack of social networks."

With Canada's declining birthrate and aging population, there is a growing need for young skilled workers to address the labour shortage. The employment of highly skilled immigrant workers is one potential avenue to solve this problem. However according to Statistics Canada (2019), immigrants and racialized people despite being skilled workers have some of the highest unemployment rates. This disparity between having skilled workers with high unemployment rates – also known as the skills gap – represents an underutilized task force. Numerous studies have provided strong evidence that the causes of unemployment and underemployment lie in various barriers these equity-deserving groups are facing, including systemic and individual discrimination on the part of employers, nonrecognition and devaluation of credentials and work experience obtained outside of Canada, and immigrants' lack of familiarity with Canadian work culture, and lack of social networks (Ng & Gagnon, 2020; Guo, 2009; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). The barriers exist at multiple levels – often international experience and education, while important for entry into Canada – are not recognized in the Canadian labour market. Even when immigrants have the recognized qualifications, those with "foreign-sounding" last names are less likely to get called to interviews than those with Anglo-Saxon-sounding names (Banerjee et al., 2017).

There is little doubt that the employers bemoaning labour and skills shortages are part of the problem and that bias is often built into the systems used to recruit, assess, and promote employees. At the same time, employers will cite mismatches between the criteria used to select newcomers and the lack of attention on the needs for skilled trades and general labourers. Postsecondary institutions are also part of the problem in addition to being part of the solution. For instance,

while bridging programs are designed to provide immigrants with the Canadian experience needed to advance in the labour market, they produce uneven outcomes for newcomers often because they are not tailored to the needs of employers (Sattler et al., 2015).

Settlement organizations funded by the government also produce uneven results. For example, while there are many government-funded settlement agencies that provide employment-related services, there is evidence that they have limited engagement with employers particularly with small and medium enterprises, which account for the majority of private sector employment in Canada (IECBC, 2012; Drolet et al., 2014). Moreover, less than one third of principal applicants report using these services (IRCC, 2017) and other research has suggested that the higher their level of education the less satisfied they are with settlement employment services (Diversity Institute & Region of Peel, 2009). Often the models of teaching and learning are antiquated and ineffective. For example, English language training in the province of Ontario has been critiqued by the auditor general: "we found that just 33% of English learners with 800 or more hours of instruction progressed by an average of one Canadian language benchmark" (Auditor General of Ontario, 2017).

Another challenge is fragmentation and lack of information sharing: "Agencies are often not aware of relevant projects beyond their boundaries. The absence of a transfer mechanism acts as a significant brake on innovation at the industry level... the sector already has an innovation engine in the form of individuals with skills and creativity; what it lacks is a transmission for linking this creativity to a learning and dissemination strategy that would lead to enhanced sector-wide performance" (CISSA, 2012).

> **" A systemic approach is needed that is based on careful analysis of disaggregated data to understand where the barriers and friction occur."**

Currently in Canada, there are challenges in the skills and employment ecosystem in terms of the supply (job seekers), demand (employers) and intermediaries (service providers). A systemic approach is needed that is based on careful analysis of disaggregated data to understand where the barriers and friction occur. Put simply, there are areas where newcomers and racialized Canadians need support in developing their skills and capacity, where employers need to embrace more inclusive approaches instead of looking for skills in all the wrong places, and where service providers need to adopt employer-centred, culturally appropriate approaches to ensure that they are not training people for jobs that do not exist. Evidence-based approaches can reduce friction and help build more accountable and cost-effective solutions, but

the first step is to recognize the complex nature of the problem and the nuanced differences facing different populations, sectors, regions, and sizes of organizations.

> **" It is difficult for the public sector to solve complex problems, as accountability and responsibility is entrenched in "narrowly focused vertical silos" at the expense of horizontal collaboration."**

ADOPTING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH TO SUSTAIN INNOVATION

Bureaucracies are designed to preserve stability and structure and to avoid risk. They are often preoccupied with gathering evidence and conducting analyses rather than implementing action. Bureaucracies are also predisposed to working independently and autonomously. It is difficult for the public sector to solve complex problems, as accountability and responsibility is entrenched in "narrowly focused vertical silos" at the expense of horizontal collaboration (Urban, 2018). Evidence of fragmentation in the sector appears in countless evaluations. For example, the auditor general's recent follow-up report on settlement and integration services notes close to no progress on all the recommendations that pertain to enhancing coordination between ministries, including the critical first step of improving information-sharing mechanisms (Auditor General of Ontario, 2019).

In recent years, new and innovative approaches that erode barriers and challenge assumptions have evolved to address the skills and employment needs of newcomers and refugees. Applying a systems model to the skills and employment ecosystem have led us to challenge assumptions and to think of new ways of bridging gaps. New models, new technologies, new partners and new approaches to funding have created new opportunities.

One of Canada's innovations in the immigration sector was the development, for example, of private sponsorship, which emerged in 1979-80 as a way to help resettle Indochinese refugees. By leveraging government resources with supports provided through community organizations and individuals, the country was able to resettle more than 60,000 refugees with high levels of success owing in large part to the fact that sponsors provided social capital as well as financial capital to aid in the job search process (Lambert, 2017). This model was used again in 2017 when Canada pledged to create pathways for Syrian refugees, but the government also introduced a wide range of policy and service innovation enabling it to bring 26,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in only 118 days and 40,000 over a two-year period (Hamilton et al., 2020). "There was a shift in the planning culture from 'does it fit program/policy' to 'how can we make it happen'" (Hamilton et al., 2020,

p. 208). In "Lessons from the Private Sponsorship of Refugees," we explore the case study of the Ryerson University Lifelong Syria Challenge private sponsorship program as an example of effective social innovation that focused on removing roadblocks for sponsors in order to attract more than the usual suspects.

> " Programs that engage employers from the outset, such as work-integrated learning initiatives, can be used to facilitate and build relationships between settlement organizations and the private sector."

While public-private partnerships are increasingly being formed to optimize service delivery, private sector engagement in the provision of settlement services has been limited to date, even though both service providers and employers stand to benefit substantially from collaboration (Drolet et al., 2014). Evidence suggests that employers understand and accept the business case for hiring immigrants and see immigrant recruitment as vital for their business growth (IECBC, 2012). Programs that engage employers from the outset, such as work-integrated learning initiatives, can be used to facilitate and build relationships between settlement organizations and the private sector.

While settlement agencies rely for the most part on government funding, new models of employer-centred organizations have emerged in recent years – the Toronto Region Immigration Employer Council (TRIEC) broke new ground when it was founded in 2002 and since has been replicated across the country. The Employer-Refugee Round table is another example which put employers at the centre of the process focused on integrating Syrian refugees into the Canadian economy.

> " Rather than working independently and in silos, the entrepreneur devotes significant time to building teams and expanding networks. Research shows such human connections are the entrepreneur's best asset and critical to the success of their endeavours."

Sectoral and organizational change will take time. It requires close "attention to leadership, structures, reward systems, building a more risk-tolerant culture," (Cukier, 2016). At the same time, there are many examples of innovation in the settlement sector and beyond. An entrepreneurial approach does not "strive for perfection but rather allows for quick adoption and the iteration of new strategies" (Cukier, 2016). Entrepreneurs start with an opportunity and make adjustments

as they go along, without losing sight of the overarching goal. Indeed, an entrepreneurial approach prioritizes impact over output as a measurement of success. Rather than working independently and in silos, the entrepreneur devotes significant time to building teams and expanding networks. Research shows such human connections are the entrepreneur's best asset and critical to the success of their endeavours (Deutsch, 2020). It is the confluence of these characteristics – being opportunity-minded, action-oriented, impact-driven, iterative, and collaborative – that cultivates a fertile ground for innovation. (See Figure 1)

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED SOLUTIONS

While innovation is not synonymous with new technologies, these tools can certainly be drivers for innovation. New platforms such as Magnet, have been able to achieve massive scale for example, in matching newcomer job seekers with prospective employers. Other have provided new ways of assessing, developing and utilizing skills more effectively and have provided ways of providing customization for individuals (Harrington et al., 2020). COVID has rapidly accelerated the adoption of technologies across sectors – online learning, digital health, videoconferencing and remote work – which have been available for decades but underutilized. While COVID has also accelerated the digital divide – exacerbating gaps in access to technology, devices, affordability and skills – it has also provided new opportunities for innovation in pathways to employment for newcomers.

Language ability is repeatedly identified as one of the most important factors that facilitate the successful labour market integration of immigrants (Grenier & Xue, 2011; Boyd & Cao, 2009). Yet, evaluations of official language training courses show no improvements in listening and speaking skills beyond what students would have gained from living in Canada (IRCC, 2010). In "Innovations in Language Learning," we look at the role of technology in enhancing language acquisition for newcomers. The paper features many examples on tested language learning practices that have demonstrated the capacity to provide more targeted and customized education, enhance participant motivation and engagement, and offer greater flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of learners thereby making language learning more accessible.

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SKILLS AND CAREER PATHING

While there is a plethora of skills training and career development programs targeting newcomers and racialized job seekers, these have often not considered the particular needs of people who have been subjected to intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination, the experience of

ENTREPRENEUR		MANAGER
Start with perception of an opportunity	←——————————→	Start with ressources in hand (budget)
Bias toward action	←——————————→	Bias toward analysis
Marke adjustment as they go	←——————————→	Formal structure
Build teams and informal networks	←——————————→	Work independently and autonomously
Focus on impact	←——————————→	Focus on traditional metrics

Source: Adapted from Cukier. (2019). Developing Canada's Digital-Ready Public Service. Public Policy Forum.
https://ppforum.ca/publications/developing-canadas-digital-ready-public-service/

conflict or the experience of displacement, immigration, and poverty. The research is clear: one size does not fit all and the starting point for individuals who have experienced trauma is significantly different than those with privilege and supports (Cukier et. al. forthcoming). Immigrants and refugees are more likely to have experiences with trauma which, coupled with other dimensions of their experience, may shape their interactions with institutions, with education and training and with the job search.

In "Trauma-informed Career Pathing," the impact of individual and systemic trauma on employment is explored. While there has been extensive literature regarding the role of trauma in health care and youth education, discussions on the effect of trauma on adult education and skills development has only recently begun to take shape. This paper explores the benefits of trauma-informed approaches to skills training, particularly for victims of violence, people struggling with mental health issues, and Indigenous communities living with systemic and intergenerational trauma. By acknowledging the lived experiences of students in their skills training, trauma-informed approaches can be an important step towards addressing learning challenges and reducing disparities in the labour market.

There has been a growing acceptance of more demand-driven (that is, employer-facing) approaches to settlement services. Rather than focusing on "fixing" the newcomer jobseeker, newer and more effective models are looking to engage employers in programmatic design and delivery of services – as active participants, partners, or clients. In "Employer-focused Strategies to Support Newcomer Employment," we explore the various roles employers have undertaken to support newcomer integration – including skills development, work-integrated learning, and mentorship programs.

In "Entrepreneurship as a Pathway to Integration," we explore the ways in which entrepreneurship training can be harnessed to support immigrants' transition into Canada. Evidence shows that newcomers have a greater and growing propensity for pursuing entrepreneurship compared to the Canadian-born population (WEKH, 2020). While entrepreneurship can certainly be a pathway to economic success, through embarking on the entrepreneurial journey, immigrants develop various important skills that support their overall integration into Canadian life. The paper features four pilot programs, extracting best practices that can be scaled up across the settlement sector, such as providing "wraparound" support, mentorship and networking opportunities, and access to funding.

FOR MANY NEWCOMERS AND REFUGEES, EDUCATION IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER

INVESTING UPSTREAM

The public school system in Canada has played a critical role in supporting the integration of newcomer youth and helping other marginalized groups overcome barriers that hinder their learning. Canada has one of the highest rates of social mobility and access to public education is one of the critical factors shaping this. For many newcomers and refugees, education is the great equalizer – for example in the Toronto District School Board, immigrants tend to outperform Canadian-born students, in part because of the expectations of their parents. However, barriers persist, particularly for some racialized students and especially those who are Black (*TDSB*, 2017). COVID has further exacerbated these disparities, disrupting the face-to-face experience of the classroom which has played a critical role in socialization processes. In "Tutoring for School Success," we explore how an online tutoring program facilitated collaboration between community organizations and universities to address the needs of underserved groups,

including newcomers. Not only did the program improve learning outcomes for participating students and reduce familial stress, but the Study Buddy program increased awareness of inequities within the education system among the teacher candidates at the early stages of their career.

CONCLUSION

This special issue provides some recent examples of innovative practices and their potential to address current barriers to employment for immigrants, particularly those who are also racialized. The main focus is on driving in the skills and employment ecosystem as a challenge for supply (job seekers) demand (employers) and intermediaries (postsecondary institutions, training and settlement organizations). COVID-19 has demonstrated that there are opportunities to drive transformation if we can learn from our experiences with new technologies and models and resist the tendency to accept the status quo as inevitable.

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EMPLOYER-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT NEWCOMER EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) described Canada as having "the most elaborate and longest-standing skilled labour migration system" (OECD, 2019). Canada is well known for its efforts to attract highly skilled immigrants. Unfortunately, however, this ambition is not being matched by success in leveraging the skills possessed by these immigrants after arrival. Compared to Canadian-born counterparts, university-educated immigrants are twice as likely to have employment that requires no more than a high school diploma and nearly three times more likely to experience persistent over-qualification over time (Statistics Canada, 2020). And despite Canada's welcoming immigration policy, underemployment is more pervasive among recent immigrants in this country than among their US peers (42% vs. 29%) (Lu & Hou, 2019).

At the same time, Canadian businesses report that an inability to find and retain the right talent represents one of the greatest impediments to their growth (KPMG, 2020). The mismatch between educational attainment and employment outcomes suggests that much more should be done in the settlement process to ensure that all stakeholders benefit from immigration.

The underemployment and "de-skilling" of immigrants is not a new problem. A host of barriers prevent immigrants from obtaining meaningful employment, including lack of recognition of international education and experience as well as overt discrimination (Feenan & Madhany, 2021; Desjardins & Cornelson, 2011). While employers continue to complain about labour and skills shortages, they are often reluctant to hire newcomers (Fang et al., 2021). As one study showed, job applicants with "foreign sounding" last names were 30% less likely to get called back for interviews in large organizations and even less frequently by small and medium enterprises (SMEs), where the majority of private sector jobs exist (Banerjee et al., 2017). Systemic barriers also include the fact that most newcomers lack the social and professional networks (or "weak ties") that help facilitate employment opportunities (Ryan, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011). Research shows that one of the most important factors that improves labour market outcomes for newcomers is having Canadian work experience (Statistics Canada, 2019a). Yet it is notoriously difficult to obtain this initial experience, as the requirement of Canadian work experience often serves as a prerequisite for eligibility thereby screening out many immigrant applications (Rudenko, 2021; Sakamoto et al., 2010).

The interplay of these obstacles results in poor labour market outcomes for immigrants (Ng & Gagnon, 2020). The situation is particularly pronounced for immigrant women and racialized groups. Of all immigrant groups, African-born immigrants have the lowest employment rate, while those from the Philippines and Europe experience the highest levels of employment (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). Immigrant women fare worse than immigrant men and are more likely to be employed in involuntary part-time work relative to their Canadian-born counterparts (Ng & Gagnon, 2020; Hira-Friesen, 2017). The pandemic has exacerbated existing problems and risks, widening disparities in the long-term (Feenan & Madhany, 2021). Now is the time to take stock of current policies and

practices and consider implementing alternative approaches that may be more effective in supporting newcomers' transition into the workforce. At the same time, there is evidence that once employers have experience with hiring immigrants, they are highly likely to continue to hire them (Fang et al., 2021).

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS

Multiple studies show that employment is generally the top-rated priority for newcomers (Murphy, 2010). Not only does it provide a pathway to economic independence, but employment is tied to sense of self-worth and belonging. Unemployment and underemployment as well as discrimination have been shown to undermine mental and physical health among immigrants (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Szaflarski & Bauldry, 2019;). According to an evaluation of settlement services, employment-related programs have the most widespread positive impact on newcomers, contributing to several outcomes that extend beyond gaining knowledge of the Canadian work environment such as increased acquisition and utilization of language skills as well as supporting overall integration into Canadian society through improved understanding of Canadian life and culture (IRCC, 2017).

As government priority and funding have shifted, settlement agencies and community organizations have evolved their services to support career counselling, training, and employment-related programming. However, the impact of these services is uneven. Not only is there evidence that many newcomers are not availing themselves of these services (IRCC, 2017), but research further suggests that the more educated the newcomers are, the less satisfied they are with the services provided. For example, a study exploring the experiences of immigrants in Peel Region found that only 25% of highly educated immigrants were satisfied with employment-related government services compared to 34% of immigrants with a high school degree or less (Diversity Institute & Region of Peel, 2009). Educated newcomers find curricula to be outdated and not relevant to their occupation and, as such, not equipped to meet their specialized needs. Postsecondary institutions, especially colleges also provide many programs targeting newcomers, including bridging programs for regulated and unregulated professions but the results of these programs are also uneven (Sattler et al., 2015; Hathiyani, 2017).

Employers' perspectives of the services available are also mixed. A study, for example, by the Immigrant Employer Council of BC (IECBC) (2012) found that while employers understood the value of hiring immigrants, they were frustrated by the processes and fragmentation of services and service providers, reporting confusion and a low level of awareness. SMEs in particular have limited resources and patience to navigate the system for relevant information and services as well as work with multiple service providers

(IECBC, 2012). More recent research has also suggested that many are frustrated with processes for securing the talent they need as a result of immigration priorities and policies. For example, while skilled trades are in short supply, the point system does not prioritize them (RBC, 2021).

At the same time, some programs have produced encouraging results. Many stakeholders across Canada see bridging programs as highly effective in facilitating the workforce integration of immigrants (Government of Canada, 2015; Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2017). A report by then Ontario Auditor General (2017) identified bridge training programs as one of the most successful services for newcomers, noting that 71% of participants that completed these programs obtained employment in their field or in a related field. Several bridging programs are available across Canada spanning a range of professional occupations such as Qualification En Pharmacie offered by Université de Montréal, the Bridging Program for Internationally Trained Accounting Professionals offered through a partnership between CPAC, Ryerson University, and Seneca College, and Chartered Professional Accounts Ontario, the Engineering and Technology Upgrading Program offered by Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, and many others.

PROMISING PRACTICES

New employer-focused intermediaries and platforms have emerged to create meaningful employment pathways for newcomers. Individual large private sector companies have invested in targeted programs to recruit, integrate, and retain immigrant talent (Kukushkin & Watt, 2009). There are organizations such as Magnet that offer technological solutions to support diversity in hiring through partnering with immigrant-serving organizations and employers. And many agencies such as Regional Immigrant Employment Councils (IECs), among others, have been formed in the past two decades to support newcomers through an employer-centred approach.

The first IEC (the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council or TRIEC) was founded in 2003 as a regional and multi-sectoral initiative tasked with addressing the problem of immigrant underemployment. Due to its impressive results, similar initiatives have since been established across the country in Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, London, Niagara, Edmonton and Halifax. Working together, these councils offer a range of services including pre-arrival assessments, employment-focused training, career fairs, hackathons and placement services. Each Immigrant Employment Council (IEC) is unique from the other and has the autonomy to determine the right model for the city it serves. As such, employers occupy different roles depending on the IEC. Some IECs treat employers as clients, others engage employers as partners in

programmatic design and delivery, while others involve them as active participants (for e.g., serving as mentors).

In the following, we will review several promising practices that engage employers to varying degrees. In particular, we explore how employers have been leveraged to create more effective skills development resources, their engagement in work-integrated learning and mentorship programs, as well as the role of innovative employer-facing job matching platforms in facilitating newcomer employment.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Skills training programs in the settlement sector have traditionally been supply-oriented (serving jobseekers) and preoccupied with building newcomer capacity to re-enter the Canadian labour market with limited engagement from industry experts. As a result, there are many programs which have limited value in preparing newcomers for the needs of the labour market and many programs lack the rigorous evaluation needed to understand what works for whom. As mentioned earlier, more educated newcomers experience lower levels of satisfaction with the support they receive. In recent years there has been a growing understanding that programming aimed at supporting transitions to employment should begin with a focus on what employers need. This includes understanding demand and skills-specific occupations or sectors, cultivating relationships with employers and human resource experts, and designing and delivering a curriculum that addresses the expressed needs. At the same time, however, there is recognition that employers need to address the bias that is often embedded into the ways in which they define needs and, in particular, qualifications and experience required.

There are many examples of innovative programs that have an employer focus. Here are but a few:

APPLIED SKILLS CURRICULUM TO EMPLOYER NEWCOMER DEVELOPMENT (ASCEND) PROGRAM

Developed by the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (IECBC) in collaboration with Canadian employers, the ASCEND program is a demand-focused employment-readiness program that provides essential soft-skills training through interactive online modules as well as virtual and in-person workshops. Since it first launched, ASCEND has already been delivered to 155 skilled newcomers across 17 cohorts in the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario and expected to soon expand to Alberta and Saskatchewan with promising outcomes.

> "ASCEND's interactive learning has given me immense knowledge, especially about the expectations from hiring managers. It has also helped me refine the way I portray myself in a new country and understand the corporate culture. The program has given me confidence" – ASCEND Program Participant (ASCEND, 2020)

FACILITATING ACCESS TO SKILLS (FAST) PROGRAM.

The FAST program is a dual-client approach to skills development with the goal of better preparing immigrants to enter the labour market while simultaneously helping Canadian employers find skilled talent. FAST provides occupation-specific competency assessment and gap training to equip incoming and landed immigrants with industry standard cultural and technical skills. Key to the program's success was the sectoral insights provided by industry partners such as BioTalent Canada and the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC).

The program has expanded since launching in early 2019 due to impressive early results: two thirds of clients found employment in their field within the first month of arriving in Canada, and the program received a 90% satisfaction rate from participants (Future Skills Centre, 2021). Initially, FAST served clients in 68 occupations in skilled trades, biotechnology, life sciences, and information technology but has since grown to include accounting, tourism, hospitality, and healthcare sectors. While FAST is led by IECBC, program offerings span beyond the borders of British Columbia due to partnerships with other immigrant-serving organizations such as Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), ACCES Employment Ontario, Success Skills Centre Manitoba, and the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC).

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMS

Work-integrated learning is increasingly being recognized as a key pedagogical practice for enhancing learning outcomes and employability of university students and graduates. By merging academic studies with real workplace experience, WIL provides opportunities to combine theory and practice, further deepening learners' knowledge and developing their work-related skills. WIL also has numerous benefits for employers, as it provides them with enthusiastic employees that bring fresh perspectives to the workplace, while providing existing employees the opportunity to develop critical and management skills. A move toward WIL and away from traditional classroom-based training can provide immigrants with the Canadian work experience that often serves as a prerequisite to employment. Expanding WIL models for newcomers (including those that have already obtained international degrees) have produced encouraging results.

FEDERAL INTERNSHIP FOR NEWCOMERS (FIN) PROGRAM

The FIN program was launched by IRCC in 2010 to provide WIL opportunities for newcomers. It offers eligible newcomers a chance to gain valuable temporary work experience and training opportunities with Canadian federal, provincial and municipal organizations. Delivered in partnership with immigrant-serving organizations, FIN covers a range of disciplines and fields, including administration, project support and management, policy and research, and computer science. It is designed to improve newcomers' understanding of hiring processes and Canadian workplace culture, as well as provide them with the opportunity to expand their professional networks (Government of Canada, 2021).

The program has grown from 71 interns to 830 interns across 50 government departments. The majority of hiring managers (89%) had a positive experience with the program and were supportive of rehiring participants. Many managers (65%) saw that newcomer interns enhanced productivity and creativity in the workplace (Hire Immigrants Ottawa, n.d.). While there are other barriers to non-citizens in joining the federal public service, this program has provided them with experience that allows some to transition into jobs in the public sector and others to obtain employment elsewhere having acquired Canadian experience.

ADVANCED DIGITAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING (ADAPT) - PEGASYSTEMS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) program aims to bridge the employment gap for recent graduates. The program was developed by Ryerson University's Diversity Institute in 2014 and is being delivered in partnership with TECHNATION with support from the Future Skills Centre. ADaPT provides participants with more than 70 hours of intensive training on the most in-demand skills as well as work placements to connect learners to paid employment opportunities. Approximately 80% of participants belong to one or more equity-seeking groups. Since 2014, ADaPT has helped transition more than 900 postsecondary graduates into meaningful careers while providing employers with talent to fill the acute skills demand. The success of the model is evident in ADaPT's average job placement rate: over 90% of participants received placements throughout the program's existence (Diversity Institute, 2021)

Building on ADaPT's model, the Pegasystems Certification Program was created to prepare internationally trained workers to become Pega Certified Systems Architects, equipping new immigrants with a recognized Canadian certification and marketable skills that are sought by employers. Initial discussions focused on the possibility of embedding Pega training into Ryerson University's formal computer science curriculum but many impediments prevented this from being done in the short term – curriculum revisions have long approval times. In collaboration with Pegasystems Inc. and Cognizant, a major IT systems integrator, Diversity Institute facilitated a no-cost, four-week intensive program to a cohort of 16 newcomers with technology qualifications who faced difficulties transferring their skills to the Canadian labour market. Those who passed the certification exam were connected directly to potential hiring partners. Out of the 14 participants that passed the exam, 12 received offers of employment (2 returned to school) (Diversity Institute, 2021). Critical to the success of the program was the early engagement of employers – participants were screened and approved by potential hiring partners in order to be admitted to the program.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Mentoring is a low-cost intervention that works. Research shows that mentorship programs can increase minority representation at the management level by 9-24% (compared to -2% to 18% with other diversity interventions) and improve promotion and retention rates of marginalized groups by 15–38% (compared to non-mentored employees) (Conby & Kelly, 2016). Integrating newcomers into a community and organization requires investment of time, encouragement, assistance, guidance, and feedback – all which can be provided by a well-designed mentorship program. By working with employers, immigrant-serving organizations can leverage the right expertise to serve as mentors. Mentors are also provided with the opportunity to enhance leadership and coaching skills, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and gain a better understanding of the skills and experience of immigrants.

TORONTO REGION IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (TRIEC) MENTORSHIP PARTNERSHIP

The Mentorship Partnership program is one of the oldest and most established TRIEC programs that match recent immigrants with established professionals who work in their field in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Since it first launched in 2004, the program has facilitated over 22,000 mentoring matches and built partnerships with over 40 community organizations and employers such as Accenture, Bank of Montreal, Starbucks, TELUS, Manulife, and many others spanning different sectors. A recent evaluation of the program (TRIEC, 2020) shows impressive results newcomers:

- Program participants are 2.45 times more likely to find good quality employment;

- 85% of those employed after the program are in permanent and full-time jobs;

- Program participants are 4 times more likely to expand their networks; and

- Over 80% of participants reported to have developed stronger preparedness for application and interviewing processes.

Employers also benefited from the program. Over 80% of mentors improved their ability to communicate with colleagues from different cultures and nearly 70% had higher confidence in their ability to coach and mentor others. In addition to helping them fulfill their social responsibility objectives, mentorship programs are seen by employers as an opportunity to attract diverse talent.

JOB MATCHING PLATFORMS

In recent years there have emerged a number of platforms aimed at matching jobseekers to employers – Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and Switch are examples of such applications. While these platforms may alert jobseekers to opportunities that match their skills and experience, jobseekers must still go through generally traditional recruitment processes where they will be subject to implicit biases which disadvantage

marginalized and underrepresented groups. Fortunately, there have been new platforms created that harness intelligent matching technology, data and analytics to support bias-free recruitment strategies.

MAGNET

Magnet was cofounded in 2014 by Ryerson University and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. It provides matching capacity to 383 partner organizations, including 57 Chambers of Commerce as well as 32,000 other employers, 170,000 jobseekers and over 1 million postsecondary students. Fuelled by artificial intelligence, Magnet allows precise targeting based on skills and its diversity tracking features enable employers to target specific underrepresented groups – a growing priority for many. In addition, Magnet can be "white labelled" for local providers providing both the advantages of scale and as well as decentralized and local control. A new platform, for instance, is being created specifically to facilitate the employment of 40,000 Afghan refugees expected to arrive in the next few years. Magnet is the host of HireImmigrants.ca, developed in collaboration with the Global Diversity Exchange in 2016 as a program of the Diversity Institute offering a series of tools to support improving opportunities for newcomers, many of whom are racialized.

FIGURE 1.

Magnet

Industry Hub
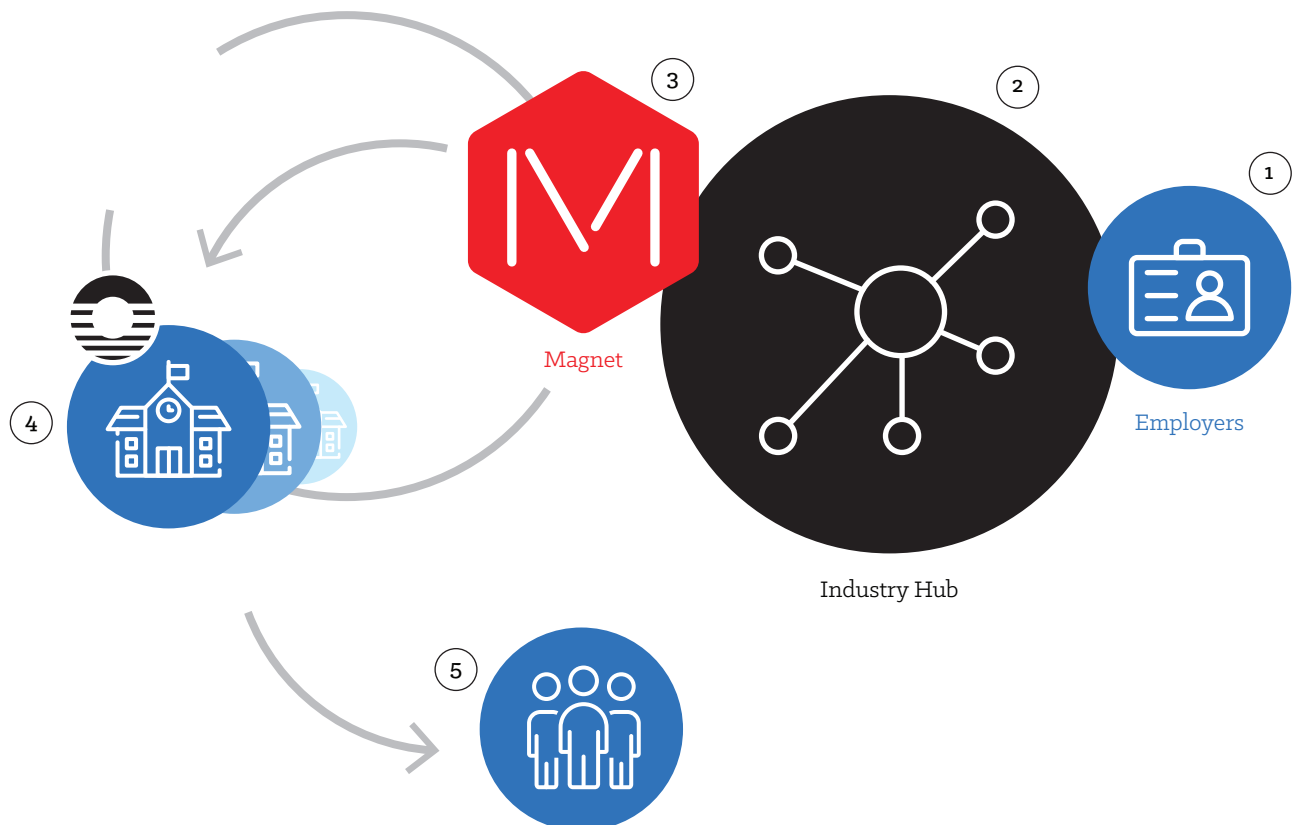
Employers

CONCLUSION

Providing more effective pathways for immigrant workforce integration is essential for the country's economic success. The question is how to design and implement more demand-informed and employer-facing programs that maximize benefits for all stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the efficacy of settlement programs is hindered by the lack of industry ownership and employer engagement. While it is laudable that IECs have set up employer advisory bodies to inform program design and delivery, in many cases employer engagement does not go far enough. For many programs, employers are visibly absent when it comes to program co-certification, co-delivery, and in making tangible and concrete commitments to drive results (such as agreeing to hire a certain percentage of cohort graduates).

More active engagement of employers in the integration process is not only beneficial for newcomers, but employers have a substantial stake in hiring and optimizing immigrant workers. By highlighting some innovative examples that already exist, we hope to inspire further adaptation of these impactful practices.

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TRAUMA-INFORMED CAREER PATHING

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that a significant proportion of Canadian adults have experienced trauma in their lifetime (Joshi et al., 2021; Kealy & Lee, 2018). For example, in a recent study, 45,000 Canadians (61.6%) reported exposure to at least one traumatic "adverse childhood experience" (ACE) and 35.6% reported exposure to two or more (Joshi et al., 2021).

The term "trauma" encompasses both individual and collective forms, which includes systemic and historical trauma. In Canada, collective trauma is disproportionally experienced by racialized and Indigenous communities (Allan & Smylie, 2015; McKenzie, 2017; Poole et al., 2017) as well as migrants and refugees, with an estimated 40% of immigrants coming from countries undergoing war and social trauma having been exposed to traumatic events (Rousseau et al., 2011). While many individuals exposed to traumatic events will heal after reaching safety, for some, there are lasting negative impacts on psychological and social development (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; De La Rue & Ortega, 2019; Nestel, 2012).

> " These individual and collective traumas create additional challenges in navigating education and training opportunities as well as the labour market, especially for marginalized communities – who experience high levels of trauma, while also encountering systemic barriers to employment."

These individual and collective traumas create additional challenges in navigating education and training opportunities as well as the labour market, especially for marginalized communities – who experience high levels of trauma, while also encountering systemic barriers to employment (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Cukier, forthcoming; Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011). Unfortunately, there is currently a dearth of research on how to develop trauma-informed services to enhance career pathing for Canadian workers, something that we are working to change.

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON ADULT EDUCATION

Whereas trauma has been explored in health care settings (Anderson, 2019) as well as youth education (Davidson, 2017; Levi, 2019), its effects on adult education and training are only beginning to be understood. Consequently, many employers and training providers feel "ill-equipped to deal directly with trauma" (Skiba, 2020).

Research into trauma is important for improving the trajectory of adult learners in Canada. Their struggles in education may include unresolved trauma which can result in "deep attitudinal barriers and internalized fear of learning" (Davidson, 2017; Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011). For example, adverse childhood experiences can cause physiological changes in the developing brain, leading to cognitive losses and behavioural changes (e.g., hyperactivity and poor impulse control) that affect engagement in educational and skills training environments (Burke et al., 2011; Skiba, 2020; Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk, 2000; van der Kolk, 2003).

In a study of postsecondary learners, Hoch et al. (2015) (as cited in Davidson, 2017) identified several characteristics of students living with trauma, including:

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling

- Tendency to miss a lot of classes

- Challenges with emotional regulation

- Fear of taking risks

- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking

- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed

- Withdrawal and isolation

- Involvement in unhealthy relationships

INEQUITY FROM SYSTEMIC AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA

When creating a trauma-informed program for career pathing, it is vital to include considerations of systemic and historical trauma, which affect certain segments of the population more than others.

> "Addressing systemic trauma involves recognition that negative impacts are not felt equally across all segments of society. Members of displaced and marginalized populations – including Black and racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, women, immigrants, and refugees – have often experienced multiple traumas over their lifetime."

"Systemic trauma" can be defined as the impact of institutions and cultures that contribute to widespread trauma, accounting for "contextual features of environments and institutions that give rise to trauma, maintain it, and impact post-traumatic responses" (Goldsmith et al., 2014). Addressing systemic trauma involves recognition that negative impacts are not felt equally across all segments of society. Members of displaced and marginalized populations – including Black and racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, women, immigrants, and refugees – have often experienced multiple traumas over their lifetime (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Cukier, forthcoming; De La Rue & Ortega, 2019; Levi, 2019).

To address this inequity, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) extends their definition of trauma beyond a focus on the individual – advancing a systemic concept of trauma that incorporates de-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive principles (OCASI, 2018). Adult learners who are immigrants from other countries, particularly those who have faced forced migration, experience unique challenges related to systemic trauma (Davidson, 2017; Dessoff, 2011). Research shows how newcomers face major barriers that hinder successful learning experiences, including: "post-traumatic stress and ongoing sense of fear... long bureaucratic processes, disintegration of the family unit, financial difficulties, frequent relocation, and drastic cultural disorientation" (Levi, 2019). A recent study estimated that the prevalence of clinical post-traumatic stress disorder in refugees is approximately 9%, and, while it often goes in hand with depression, it generally has a favourable prognosis, particularly with culturally sensitive psychological treatments (Rousseau et al., 2011). The study recommends a phased approach for refugees focusing on providing practical family and social support to create a sense of safety, noting that care practitioners need to be aware that exposure to traumatic events is likely in newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

"Historical trauma" is a form of systemic trauma that continues to affect specific populations over long periods of time. To put it differently, historical trauma is the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma" (BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council, 2013). Groups of people who have been subjected to "mass trauma – colonialism, slavery, war, genocide – exhibit a higher prevalence of disease even several generations after the original trauma occurred" (Sotero, 2006). In Canada, historical trauma has disproportionately affected Indigenous communities, as a result of colonization, residential schools, and "the '60s Scoop," among other forms of oppression (Poole, 2017).

DESIGNING CULTURALLY SAFE SPACES

To account for the pervasive effects of systemic trauma, culturally safe practices aim to reduce power imbalances that persist in society, while also focusing on individual ideals of respect and self-determination.

Defined in the late 1990s by Irihapeti Ramsden – a Maori nurse in Aotearoa (also known as New Zealand) – a "culturally safe" setting is one in which a person "experiences spiritual, social, emotional, and physical safety… It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening" (Ramsden, 2002).

Culturally safe spaces in Canada recognize that different populations that live on this land – including new immigrants (Ng & Gagnon, 2020), Black and racialized people (Diversity Institute, 2019; Environics Institute et al., 2017), Indigenous peoples (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; OECD, 2018), and persons with disabilities (Morris et al., 2018; Tompa et al., 2020) – have different needs and ways of thinking, which will affect the appropriateness and effectiveness of skills training programs.

As such, representatives from different communities should be present at the leadership level of new educational and training programs; to ensure that their perspectives are reflected in curricula as well as top-level decision-making (Terare, 2019). This demonstrates a respect for multiple forms of knowledge in the design of policy and practice alike (Poole et al., 2017).

ESTABLISHING TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES

Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is a model established by Harris and Fallot (2001), which enshrines five guiding principles for services: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has developed guidelines for advancing this sense of collaboration – called Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches (TVIA) (OCASI, 2018) – that acknowledge the connections among various forms of violence, trauma, and negative life consequences. OCASI aims to support new pathways for self-care, resilience, and community-building through the four principles of TVIA:

1. **Generalist Practice:** establishing "universal trauma precautions" to provide positive supports for all people, recognizing that everyone can be dealing with invisible trauma.

2. **Preventing Re/Traumatization:** having the mandate of "doing no harm" as the basis of all policies and practices.

3. **Fostering Safety:** committing to create and ensure emotional, physical, psychological, interpersonal, social, cultural, and systemic safety for all people.

4. **Continuing Growth and Community Building:** incorporating a strength-based approach and fostering opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection.

Another example is the guidance on trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approaches to workplaces developed by the Native Women's Association of Canada (2019). The report identifies the importance of Elders in organizations with Indigenous employees, as they provide spiritual and emotional support in addition to bringing knowledge of the land, culture and ceremony to the workplace. Through understanding Indigenous intergenerational trauma and its present-day impacts, Elders have the ability to empathize, acknowledge and validate the trauma the person has suffered.

The Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre (2017) has also developed resources that can assist with trauma-informed career pathing in the form of an organizational self-assessment and a toolkit which outlines the steps and processes to becoming a trauma-informed organization. The toolkit is structured around four criteria: overall policy and program mandates (including a clearly written policy statement, evidence-informed practices, leadership style, etc.); hiring practices (trauma general awareness training, including trauma content in job description, etc.); policies and procedures (e.g., policies on minimizing retraumatization); and monitoring and evaluation.

In the United States, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA) is a recognized leader in this area. With the objective of supporting systems to become more trauma-informed, SAMHSA developed guidance for an organizational trauma-informed approach, which builds upon Harris and Fallot's foundational model. This guidance is organized around ten domains for implementing and sustaining a trauma-informed approach within an organization, which include:

- governance and leadership;
- policy;
- the physical environment;
- engagement and involvement;
- cross sector collaboration;
- screening, assessment, and treatment services;
- training and workforce development;
- progress monitoring and quality assurance;
- financing; and
- evaluation (SAMHSA, 2014).

CASE STUDY: CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY REHABILITATION PLAN (CIRP)

Founded in the 1980s, CIRP is an early example of trauma-informed practices in Canada, establishing addiction treatment resources for the unionized construction industry. The program has continually evolved and expanded over 35 years, providing mental health services for the workplace that are grounded in up-to-date evidence on substance abuse.

CIRP has grown to 40,000 members as of 2021. Its main service offering is trauma counselling to workers, while also actively educating employers on how to be allies around mental health. By training management and peers to use language that is non-stigmatizing, CIRP establishes safe spaces for workers while actively spreading awareness of the damaging effects of "negative labelling" on recovery.

"My recovery has both good and bad days. Whatever the baseline, every single one of my therapy sessions improves my day and equips me with tools for tomorrow."–CIRP Client

When approaching employers about trauma-informed methods, CIRP recommends starting at the most basic level with management, who may have no prior experience with inclusive policies. By having external evaluators – such as health care professionals and academic researchers – conduct on-site evaluations of company procedures, employers can begin the process of updating their practices to become trauma-informed.

CASE STUDY: WORK THERAPY PROGRAMS FOR SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA, ABUSE AND/OR VIOLENCE

Work therapy programs, such as the Canadian Women's Foundation's "The Way Out" initiative, are another example of trauma-informed career support. In addition to providing skills training, therapeutic work programs provide social and emotional support for survivors of trauma and people that experience persistent mental health challenges. Thus, participants not only develop skills that would increase their capacity to obtain and maintain meaningful employment, they are also provided with a sense of purpose and normalcy.

One of the main objectives of "The Way Out" is to build self-confidence and independence for survivors of trauma. The program provides barrier-free service to women and LGBTQ2S+ people. It equips participants with skills and strategies for adapting to new work placements that build on their strengths at their own pace. This supportive and nurturing environment sets a foundation for healing and empowers survivors to reclaim their lives after trauma, abuse and/or violence.

CASE STUDY: ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

Imagination FX is an Indigenous-owned organization based in British Columbia that specializes in leadership, coaching and organizational development. Many of their projects are implemented through tripartite relationships and focus on providing essential skills and employment readiness programs to Indigenous participants. An important component of these programs is that the initial assessment of participants includes an evaluation of their strengths as well as challenges, taking into account their past and present trauma. The assessment considers challenges such as access to transportation and childcare, experience or family's experience with residential schools, substance abuse and criminal activity. The program itinerary is designed to provide skills and activities that respond to the top three challenges identified by the cohort, including holistic supports for substance abuse, grief and mental health.

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES TO CAREER PATHING

Building on the research that has been done on trauma as well as our understanding of the ways in which it affects different populations and individuals, we propose applying a trauma-informed approach to supporting diverse groups through the entire career pathing process.

The goal of trauma-informed career pathing is to understand that different individuals are starting at different points and need different levels of support during their pathway to employment and advancement. Adapting Escobari's model (Figure 1), Cukier (forthcoming) proposes that we recognize the different stages in pathways to employment – user entry (the decision to pursue employment or careers), building self-efficacy, navigating the career and employment system, overcoming social and economic barriers (which are often overlooked), accessing teaching and content, securing employment and sustaining support and advancement – may all be experienced differently by people suffering from the effects of trauma.

For many, even coming to the decision to try to advance their education or secure a career may be overwhelming. Self-efficacy may be damaged and significant efforts may be needed to build confidence and actively support the ability to be persistent and resilient when facing barriers. Experiences of systemic discrimination produce different relationships with institutions and discourage people from even trying to progress their careers. For example, while over 90% of Black youth would like to attend university, over 40% of Black students do not apply to a postsecondary institution (Diversity Institute, 2021). Moreover, the response to failure or rejection when applying for an educational opportunity or job may be very different for someone who has experienced trauma. The most vulnerable in our society are most likely to have experienced trauma and are the least likely to have the resources to address its impact. Even the approaches to the design and delivery of educational programming and the processes of recruitment need to take this into account.

CONCLUSION

In a job market that is changing rapidly, opportunities to acquire new skills must be accessible to all adult learners. An

Encouraging user entry	Building self-efficacy	Navigating careers and systems	Assisting with economic and social barriers	Providing good content and good teaching	Sustaining support
Users need an entryway into the lifelong learning ecosystem	a belief they can succeed throughout the journey	a clean view of the pathway to success	help managing barriers like childcare and financial insecurity	scaffolded, engaging, and positivety affirming content	and continued support for on-the-job success and lifelong learning

Source: Adapted from Escobari, M. Seyal, I. Meaney, M. (n.d.) Realism About Reskilling: Upgrading the career prospects of America's low-wage workers. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Realism-about-Reskilling_Brookings_Overview-FOR-WEB.pdf. Page 13.

important starting point for building such an inclusive job market is the development of a better understanding of the extent of trauma, including intergenerational trauma, affecting certain populations. There are examples of trauma-informed approaches in working with Indigenous communities, in working with victims of violence, and in working with immigrant and refugee populations and their children. However, more attention to, and research on, the impact of trauma on racialized and particularly Black populations is needed, as they are more likely to have been victims of racism and to have been exposed to violence. The ways in which layers of identity interact are also not well understood nor generally considered in designing and delivering career counselling, skills development and utilization.

> "By emphasizing personal growth and skill acquisition through an "asset-based" approach, rather than symptom management, trauma-informed practices can foster true collaboration between employers, training providers, and workers."

Addressing the disparities in labour market outcomes experienced by Indigenous, racialized and other disadvantaged people when compared to other groups in Canadian society requires action to address collective trauma and discrimination across Canada. Advancements in career pathing require a foundational shift in how training providers understand the effects of systemic and historical trauma on adult learners. By emphasizing personal growth and skill acquisi-

tion through an "asset-based" approach, rather than symptom management, trauma-informed practices can foster true collaboration between employers, training providers, and workers (Ramasubramanian et al., 2021).

Business leaders in Canada can also step up by building a sense of shared responsibility for the physical, social, cultural, and emotional safety of all workers. This will result in significant benefits for companies and employees: minimizing the risk of individual and group re-traumatization, while also generating returns on investment in terms of increased productivity, workplace diversity, and community participation.

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TUTORING FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on education. As of April 2020, more than 90% of students globally experienced school closures due to the pandemic (*The Economist*, 2021). In many countries around the world, public health measures have required students to learn remotely for the first time.

Remote learning has created unforeseen challenges for Canadian students in primary and secondary education. In a survey of Ontario families, Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) found that more than half of parents reported their child's mental health had deteriorated during the pandemic, with worrying behavioural changes – including negativity in mood and personality, as well as difficulty sleeping (CMHO, 2020; Radomski et al., 2020). The negative effects of school closures have been greater for Canadian youth with pre-existing mental health issues, as well as students who face systemic barriers to education (CMHO, 2020; Environics Institute, 2021).

> For a variety of reasons – from unequal access to the internet and technology, to significant differences in their digital skill levels – the shift to remote learning has significant implications for inequality among students (Dorn et al., 2020; Middleton, 2021).

To support students during this difficult time, many organizations in Ontario have come together to collaborate on new academic support initiatives such as tutoring programs. This article will discuss how tutoring programs – defined as programs which provide more personalized attention for students in small groups and one-on-one sessions – can improve well-being and reduce inequality in education by accounting for the needs of marginalized students.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENTS

Even before the pandemic, systemic barriers were creating difficulties for marginalized students, and by extension, hindering the success of their communities.

Research reveals that many racialized youth disproportionally face barriers to education (Cameron, 2019; TDSB, 2017). A significant proportion of Black youth (94%) report the desire to obtain a university degree, yet data shows low rates of applications, with approximately 43% of Black students not applying to university (Diversity Institute, 2021). The Black Experience Project, which includes a survey of 1,500 Black high school students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), provides some insights into why this gap in educational attainment persists. Findings show that only 41% of Black students believed that school was a welcoming place, with 37% of respondents stating that they either "sometimes" or "never" felt accepted by their teachers (Environics Institute et al., 2017). Additionally, one in two young participants (those aged 16–24 years old) cited racism as the biggest challenge for the Black community that is not faced by other students. Furthermore, key performance metrics indicate greater difficulties for Black students when contrasted with other groups, such as higher suspension and expulsion rates and being disproportionately streamed into applied courses (Brown & Sinay, 2008; Spence & Cameron, 2019; TDSB, 2017). From 2006 to 2011, 69% of Black students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) graduated high

school, compared to 84% of White students and 87% of other racialized students (James & Turner, 2017).

Newcomer youth also often experience considerable difficulties in education; particularly first-generation students, who typically perform worse than students without an immigrant background (OECD, 2015). In Canada, newcomer students with limited English proficiency attain lower educational achievement than non-immigrant students (Lara & Volante, 2019). Without extra support, these challenges for newcomers will persist in higher education settings (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Volante et al., 2017).

> While COVID-19 and the shift to remote learning have created new challenges for all students, it has further exacerbated the difficulties that marginalized students face in the Canadian education system.

For example, immigrant youth were more likely to indicate that COVID-19 negatively impacted their schooling and academic success (ACS, 2020). The shift to remote classes has reduced opportunities for one-on-one assistance, including peer-to-peer learning and teacher-to-student instruction. For newcomers, in particular, this has left a significant gap as they are often unable to turn to their parents for learning support due to their limited language skills. As such, these students tend to be less self-efficacious when approaching independent homework tasks (Bang et al., 2011).

Even if immigrants had the language skills to understand the subject matter, many immigrants and racialized groups are overrepresented among healthcare workers and a significant proportion are precariously employed as essential workers, which means that they are unable to work from home to supervise and provide one-on-one scholastic assistance to their children (Turcotte & Savage, 2020; James, 2020). The demands on low-income parents to monitor their children's learning while also working full-time creates considerable household stress. Research during the pandemic shows that parents with children who struggle with remote learn-ing experience elevated levels of stress. This same research highlights the importance of supporting parents as a way to improve children's education outcomes (Davis et al., 2021).

THE VAST POTENTIAL OF TUTORING PROGRAMS

There is growing evidence that tutoring can be an effective supplement to traditional models of education. Students in classrooms tend to only spend about 65% of their time "on task," while this number rises to over 90% for students while they are being tutored (Ander et al., 2016). Tutoring has also been shown to improve "student attitudes and interest," while increasing the amount of real-time feedback and correction for each student (Ander et al., 2016). This extra support ensures

that more individual attention is available for students experiencing difficulties in their education.

Tutoring is also an effective strategy for addressing the learning losses emerging from school closures. Reports show that there has been a substantial increase in demand for such services (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2020). However, while wealthier families have the capacity to arrange for private learning support, this is seldom the case for low-income families among which newcomers and racialized individuals are over-represented. The shift to remote learning and uneven access to supplementary academic support has deepened inequities in education outcomes, with marginalized students falling further behind.

Innovative strategies have arisen to manage the extra costs associated with widespread tutoring. Pilot programs in the US have leveraged the expertise of trained college graduates, which creates high-quality learning environments for young students while keeping costs low. "The results are impressive: participating students learned one to two additional school years of mathematics in a single year" (Dorn et al., 2020). Based on these early results, the National Student Support Accelerator is aiming to scale this initiative nationwide in the US by increasing funding and establishing quality standards (Dorn et al., 2020).

With tutoring as a complement to regular classroom instruction, students may have greater potential to "achieve the many long-term economic benefits that go along with academic success" (Ander et al., 2016).

CANADIAN PILOT PROGRAM: STUDY BUDDY

Led by Ryerson University's Diversity Institute and several partner organizations, Study Buddy seeks to provide K-12 students in Canada with extra support during the pandemic, with a focus on supporting racialized students and newcomers. Since May 2020, Study Buddy has provided over 5,500 hours of tutoring support, connecting 200 tutors from five universities with more than 400 students.

> Parent: "Because of this program, my daughter has developed a real love for math… Her teacher said she is not afraid to try now – and even when she is wrong, she takes feedback in a positive way."

Study Buddy has been designed as a mutually beneficial opportunity for both students and tutors: students receive free one-on-one tutoring from highly qualified tutors, who are teacher candidates completing their degree requirements for practical fieldwork. This arrangement was made possible through contributions from Ontario Tech University, Laurentian

University, Nipissing University, Queen's University and the University of Toronto, who helped to source teacher candidates for the program.

Study Buddy has also relied on a variety of community organizations to connect it to learners in need of its programming such as the Lifelong Leadership Institute, which builds leadership in students of African-Canadian heritage; the Jean Augustine Centre, which aims to empower young women through programming such as mentorship and experiential learning; and Kingston Employment and Youth Services (KEYS), a non-profit that serves a diverse population including persons with disabilities, mature students, and newcomers to Canada. Other community organizations include Midaynta Community Services, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), YWCA Toronto, Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA), Black Female Accountants Network (BFAN), Indus Community Services, YMCA Sudbury, Nigerian Community of Greater Sudbury, Afro-Heritage Association of Sudbury, and the Multicultural Youth Center of Thunder Bay.

A survey was conducted among families that participated in the Study Buddy program to evaluate its efficacy (Diversity Institute, unpublished). Over 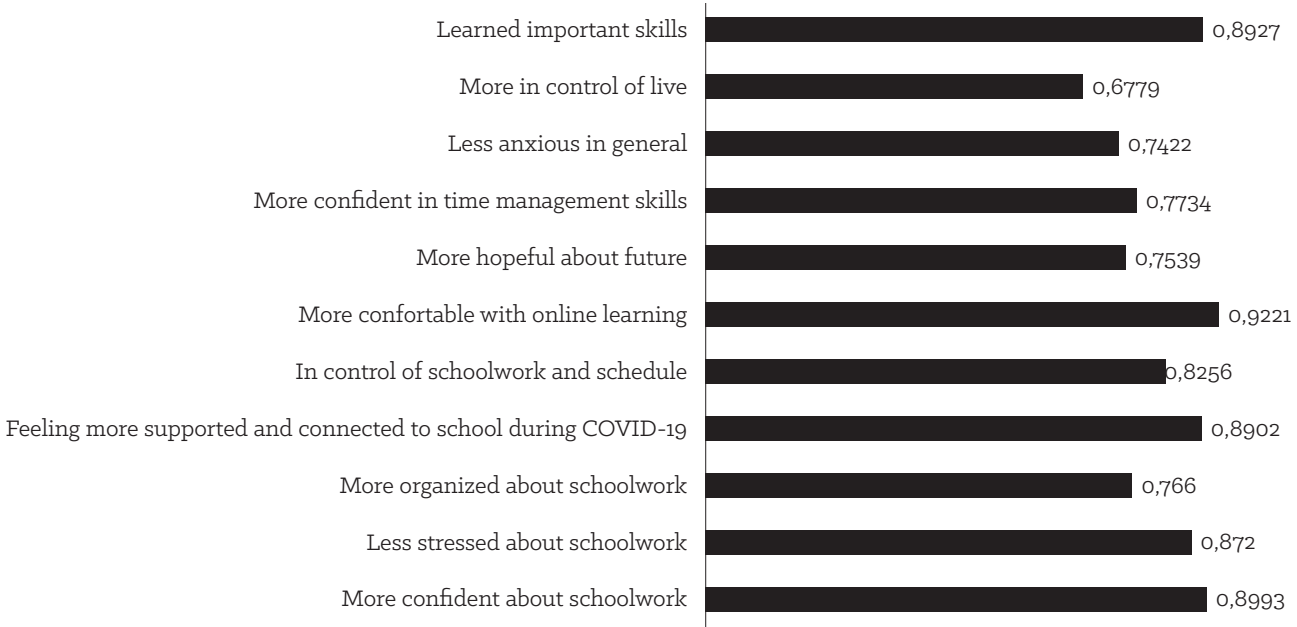80% of respondents identified as a visible minority or belonging to a racialized group and nearly 12% identified as a newcomer (i.e., arrived in Canada within the last five years). The survey results show that the Study Buddy program had a positive impact on student learning. A significant majority indicated that the program contributed to an increased comfort with online learning (92%), increased confidence in schoolwork (90%), learning an important skill (89%) and reduced stress (87%).

In addition to the quantitative findings showing a greater sense of support and connectedness to school during the pandemic (89%), anecdotal evidence from parents affirm the importance of the program in a remote learning environment:

> "please keep doing it, it helped fill in the gap so much with the COVID-19 missing of classes. I realized my 8-year-old son was more receptive to the teacher while being taught than when I was guiding him to study."

Student: "I received an outstanding achievement award in Chemistry. My final mark was 96% and I believe one of the things that contributed to this award was the tutoring I received."

FIGURE 1: STUDY BUDDY'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS' LEARNING

Learned important skills	0,8927
More in control of live	0,6779
Less anxious in general	0,7422
More confident in time management skills	0,7734
More hopeful about future	0,7539
More confortable with online learning	0,9221
In control of schoolwork and schedule	0,8256
Feeling more supported and connected to school during COVID-19	0,8902
More organized about schoolwork	0,766
Less stressed about schoolwork	0,872
More confident about schoolwork	0,8993

Study Buddy has not only helped improve education outcomes for participating students, but is also beneficial for other members of their families. The majority of the parents recognized the program as helpful (94%) and as meeting the needs of their family (90%). In addition to reducing the parent's stress (84%), the program has been effective in reducing overall family stress (82%).

Met the needs of our family	90%
Made me feel more hopeful about the future	85%
Reduced overall family stress	82%
Reduced my stress	84%
Reduced my anxiety	80%
Was helpful	94%
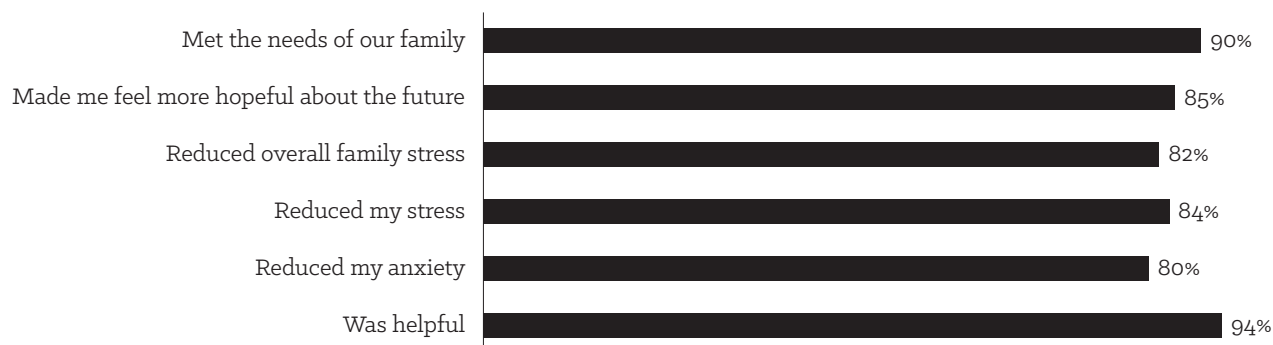
One of Study Buddy's keys to success has been its emphasis on positively impacting all participants, including the teacher candidates who serve as tutors. Overall, teacher candidates have benefited from:

- First-hand experiences with inclusion for racialized and marginalized students

- Opportunities to experiment with new virtual tools and lessons

- Training in diversity and inclusion and anti-Black racism

- Completion of degree requirements, despite COVID-19 restrictions

The majority of tutors have found that the program provided them with meaningful work-integrated learning opportunities that enabled the development of important skills, including teaching and learning (91%), interpersonal (89%), problem solving and decision-making (78%), as well as technology (75%).

But perhaps one of the more exciting impacts of the Study Buddy program is that it is fostering empathy and increasing awareness of inequities that tutors will bring into their teaching careers. Many tutors have reported that the program opened their eyes to the additional barriers that affect the education outcomes of marginalized youth:

> "Overall, this community leadership experience has greatly impacted me both personally and professionally. I am now a more conscientious teacher who's aware of the inequality that exists within our education system. With this knowledge also comes the realization that I need to do my part to make sure my classroom teaching practices promote equity for all so that all students have the tools and support that they need to succeed."

CONCLUSION

Education is the strongest predictor of social mobility, and research has shown that racialized and newcomer students have clear disadvantages in achieving educational success due to systemic barriers. These vulnerable youth and their families, who have experienced hardships due to COVID-19 restrictions, need more support that:

- Recognizes the complex nature of the digital divide, including experiences of racialized people.

- Increases affordable access to infrastructure and devices for remote learning.

- Enhances access to support services, including mental health.

While tutoring cannot solve the underlying systemic problems entirely, programs like Study Buddy can help combat educational inequity by augmenting online learning and providing personalized support to marginalized students. Moreover, Study Buddy has helped several families achieve a renewed sense of hope for the future – which is critical in reversing the decline in mental health and well-being experienced by many communities during the pandemic.

By coordinating institutional resources between universities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Study Buddy has been able to meet the needs of Canadian students, their families, and teacher candidates simultaneously. And by expanding this program further, its leadership team intends to establish an enduring system that ensures marginalized students are not left behind, as the educational landscape in Canada continues to evolve.

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LANGUAGE TRAINING INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

Fluency in spoken and written English or French is important to the success of newcomers to Canada. Not only are language skills awarded points in the immigration process and critical to accessing postsecondary education, but these skills are essential for navigating Canadian society and finding employment. Empirical research has shown that official language skills are critical to both social belonging and career progression for newcomers, and key to building the social capital and networks essential for success (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Grenier & Xue, 2011; Derwing & Waugh, 2012). Globally, research shows similar findings – that language training plays a significant role for newcomer integration (Arendt et al., 2021).

Yet Canada's track record in supporting the development of language skills for newcomers is uneven. Studies of the effectiveness of current approaches are not encouraging in spite of the massive investments governments make. There is evidence to suggest that we need to rethink our approaches and consider new models, which offer more accessible, flexible, applicable, and customizable approaches. This paper reviews some of the issues as well as promising and innovative practices.

TRADITIONAL MODELS OF LANGUAGE TRAINING IN CANADA

Across Canada, the federal government collaborates with settlement agencies to offer free language courses to eligible newcomers. The Government of Canada has established its long-term goals through the "Language Instruction for New-comers to Canada" (LINC) program. LINC courses are based on the national standards for measuring and recognizing the language skills of adult immigrants – the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) – in both official languages of English and French. LINC programs are offered by a variety of partners including community organizations and Boards of Education. Much of the delivery is in traditional classroom mode, although the pandemic has accelerated the pace of online and digital delivery.

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Evaluations of the LINC program have suggested there is room for improvement. For example, a report by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) identified language training to be the least effective service in Canada's Settlement Program (IRCC, 2017). Previous evaluations of the LINC program observed no improvements regarding participants' listening and speaking skills beyond what they would have acquired from living in Canada (IRCC, 2010). Other researchers have found evidence that many students graduate from LINC needing further language education (Baril, 2011; Fleming, 2010). A criticism of classroom environments is that they are based on a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which does

not always offer relevant content for the settings in which language will be used (Eaton, 2010; Holden & Sykes, 2011; ALLIES Canada, 2015). Generalized courses, moreover, are not effective in enhancing skills for employment. For example, a recent IRCC evaluation found clients that undertook general formal language training used English or French less frequently at work and were less comfortable using official languages than non-clients (IRCC, 2020).

Similarly, the auditor general of Ontario has identified several issues requiring follow-up regarding language training services in the province:

- Less than half of all learners have shown progress in English or French.

- Substantial variations exist in learner progress depending on the training institute, ranging from no progress shown among learners having received at least 100 hours of language training at one school board to progress shown among 78% of learners at another school board.

- Low learner progress even among learners that received more instruction, with only 33% of students with at least 800 hours of instruction progressing by an average of one Canadian language benchmark.

- Many learners report that their objectives have not been realized, with only 58% of English learners and 37% of French learners reporting that their language improved enough to obtain employment (Auditor General of Ontario, 2017).

Acquiring fluency in a second language is challenging at the best of times, particularly for adult learners. While children's acquisition of English or French as a second language can proceed at a remarkable pace, older newcomers often struggle. In addition, they often are balancing other priorities such as finding regular employment to support their family. A recent survey of 7,700 recent immigrants to Canada found stress related to work (22%) and finances (17%) to be far more prevalent than language barriers (2.8%) (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012). Consequently, many newcomers "cannot attend even the most convenient classes" (Kouritzin, 2000, p. 26).

Additionally, some research suggests that employers are more likely than newcomers to see language issues as a significant barrier and that many newcomers may not be aware of how their skills are being assessed by others. For example, a study comparing newcomer and employer perceptions of employment barriers showed that only 27% of newcomers reported language and communication skills as a barrier for them seeking employment while 95% of employers indicated that language and communications skills were a barrier to newcomers seeking employment (Allies, 2005).

One of the biggest shortcomings of traditional classroom instruction is the limited opportunity for participants to practise essential speaking and listening skills. Clients of the LINC program have reported too much emphasis on reading, writing and grammar, and not enough on listening/oral comprehension and speaking (IRCC, 2010). Practice and engagement are critical to developing an understanding of the rhythm of speech, knowledge of Canadian expressions, idioms, and/or slangs, and applied terms for employment (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

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PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The science of language acquisition and training is well established and many programs draw on the essential principles that focus on understanding learner needs, creating the conditions for language learning, designing high quality language lessons, adapt lesson delivery as needed, monitor and assess language develop and engage and collaborate with a community of practice. However very often programs are tied to traditional classroom delivery modes and pay limited attention to contextual factors – socio economic conditions, access to infrastructure, constraints in terms of time and place, needs for wrap around supports, requirements for customization and above all the need to create opportunities to apply learning.

Extensive work has been done examining the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches, for example the importance of interactivity, gamification, use of humour (Bishay, nd) in the design of language training classes and applications as well as the ways in which relevant subject matter plays a roles. But in spite of extensive research over decades, the effectiveness of language training in Canada has not improved. (See Figure 1 on page 32)

DEMANDS FOR INNOVATION

With shifts to digitization, there is more demand for anytime anywhere learning which better meets the needs of learners. Even before COVID accelerated the adoption of technology across sectors, a survey of LINC's LearnIT2Teach project revealed that learners are asking for technology integration in their learning (71.4%) as well as online alternatives (9.4%). The instructors tended to agree with 87.5% indicating that
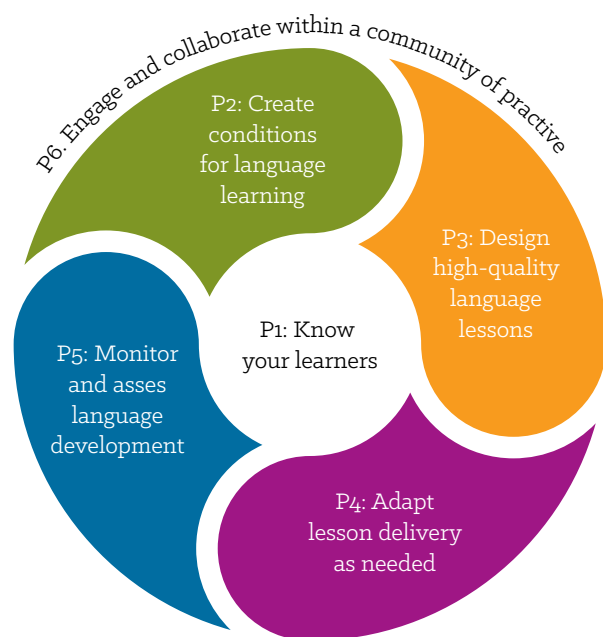
improving access to learning technologies would enhance language acquisition for newcomers (Sturm et al., 2018). However, there was limited innovation in part because of the reward and funding structures. Moreover, while online learning has a definite appeal, retention of learners is a major issue with many forms and there is limited infrastructure or standardization across service providers as well as uneven digital skills among instructors. Additionally, many applications require access to high speed internet and devices which many newcomers are unable to afford.

Technology does not need to replace place-based learning programs, but an assessment of the blended learning programs which added technology to the classroom experience increased participation and retention. Participants reported improvements in their English language skills for work, searching for employment, communicating with their children's teachers, as well as overall integration in the community (Cummings et al., 2018).

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED APPROACHES

"Adaptive Learning" using Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled systems support more targeted and customized language programs. One study showed that students using AI-powered textbooks performed four times better than those using the standard e-textbooks, while also collecting valuable data that could be used to create personalized reports (Leddo et al., 2020). Another example of AI's capacity to deliver more tailored education are language chatbots, which are

AI-powered software designed to mimic human conversations (Dokukina & Gumanova, 2020).

Currently, there are a range of commercial products available to support language learning. One of the most popular is Babbel, which boasts one million users and offers lessons in 15-minute formats online. Also online, Rosetta Stone offers multiple languages with gamification elements (using game features like achievement badges and point systems to meet learning objectives). Busuu is an innovative social learning language network. Preply is a network of expert teachers and tutors. Mondly is another application which uses chatbot and gamification features for lessons in 33 languages. Duolingo is another example that supports language learning through bite-sized lessons. AI-powered language learning platforms allow learners to work at their own pace, repeating topics and emphasizing things they have trouble with, engaging them with the tasks they're best at, appealing to their interests, and taking into account such factors as cultural background (Rohalevych, 2020).

While lacking some of the bells and whistles of other applications, Learning Upgrade, is a platform that provides online learning lessons aligned with standardized competencies, scalable mobile delivery and testing, with powerful learning management tracking and support. With the audacious goal "to transform the lives of 1 billion people with upskilling in literacy, math, and technology" the x-prize willing application uses internationally recognized testing for "skills for success" – literacy, numeracy and digital skills. The program offers over 1,020 lessons and 22 courses that work with students of all ages and abilities and while designed for a more general audience has had significant impact on ESL learners. The learning management system allows instructors to track progress and send reminders and it includes an elaborate reward and "badging" system to help "nudge" learners to persist. The Learning Upgrade App is a grand prize winner of the Barbara Bush Foundation Adult Literacy XPRIZE, a $7 million global competition challenging teams to develop a mobile app that would result in the greatest increase in literacy skills among a participating group of adult learners in just 12 months. Learning Upgrade was proven and validated in a field test of 12,000 adult learners, and produced the greatest gains pre- and post-test on a standardized reading assessment. It produced gains greater than what learners would have experienced during a year of classroom study alone. (Learning Upgrade).

> "Although they have yet to gain widespread adaptation, many studies of these tools in education have demonstrated positive results such as increased motivation to deeper learning and long-term retention."

These simulations offer language courses through real-world activities and narrative-based approaches, which can be personalized for any social and professional environment (Rieber, 2005; Nielsen & Gonzales-Lloret, 2010). Although they have yet to gain widespread adaptation, many studies of these tools in education have demonstrated positive results such as increased motivation to deeper learning and long-term retention (Kavanagh et al., 2017). VR and AR are linked to pedagogical methods that encourage learners to be actively engaged with the content, rather than passive receptors of information. Many of these tools incorporate game-based learning and gamification that are designed not only to increase their motivation but facilitate their ongoing inter-action with the subject (Huang et al., 2021; Taskiran, 2019). New tools have emerged which support more interaction and track student performance in real time using a combination of AI and AR/VR. Vancouver based Vitro, for example, is pil-oting a new product LincLingo designed to map to the goals of the LINC program – with sessions available at several tiers of the CLB, including levels 3–8 for both English and French. The application provides interactive experiences newcomers encounter when they arrive in Canada – such as booking a doctor's appointment, opening a bank account, and renting an apartment using AI Virtual Humans providing oppor-tunities to practice, get feedback and gain confidence. Each session delivers detailed analytics to learners for self-review, providing timely feedback to help accelerate the acquisition of pronunciation and grammar skills.

Unfortunately, while many technology applications for lan-guage have extensive user reviews and rankings (Trusted, 2022), there have been limited formal evaluations to assess how well they work and for whom. There is a big difference between an audience of highly educated and literate language learners from those who may not be literate in their native tongue and need to start with basic ABCs and principles of grammar. There are for example almost no randomized con-trolled trials investigating the effectiveness of a software intervention on all four language skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Most focus on the effectiveness of a literacy intervention (Cheung & Slavin, 2012; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016) or include receptive skills only (Troia, 2004). One recent study of school-age children (Harper et al. 2021) using Rosetta Stone to supplement their learning did indicate significant improvements in oral/aural skills when compared with the typical curriculum used by the partner district and the amount of software usage was positively correlated with learning gains for these skills. The authors noted that the technology provides "personalized instruction that gives stu-dents more opportunities for speaking practice and allows students to proceed at their own pace" (Harper et al., 2021, p. 14). Automated feedback on speaking accuracy allows stu-dents to practise without the fear of making a mistake in front of others. Thus, in this context, "technology may provide a low-anxiety learning environment and lead to a subsequent willingness to participate more in English in the classroom"

(Harper et al., 2021, pp. 14–15). In regard to reading and writing skills, however, the software did not provide learning gains above that of the typical classroom curriculum.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Other initiatives focus on providing programs relevant to the workplace. Not only does evidence suggest that classroom-based instruction is not effective for developing certain language skills, but research shows that these language courses often fail to provide immigrants a tangible boost in the labour market (McHugh & Challinor, 2011). As such, innovators are increasingly challenging the notion that language training has to precede employment and are exploring ways of "learning while earning."

> **"** Not only does evidence suggest that classroom-based instruction is not effective for developing certain language skills, but research shows that these language courses often fail to provide immigrants a tangible boost in the labour market."

Work-integrated learning is incredibly effective when the capacity-building burden is shared with employers. For example, McDonald's English Under the Arches program, received the E Pluribus Unum award by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) for serving as a "powerful, replicable model for workplace ESOL [English as a second or foreign language]" (MPI, 2010). Partnering with national language instruction experts and community colleges to develop and implement a work-based English curriculum, the program provides shift managers with the language skills needed to effectively manage operations and staff. Even before the pandemic, the program leveraged web-conferencing technology to allow workers in different locations to participate simultaneously from their own restaurants. Danby, a mid-sized manufacturer in Ontario, developed custom language training programs when it sponsored and hired Syrian refugees. In addition to formal ESL training, the company has implemented several initiatives including English word of the day, English lunch buddies, English learning programs with Skype tutors, TV, Mango Language, Duolingo, tea circle, etc. (GRSI, n.d.)

One example of an ambitious large-scale employer-centred program is the US-based Skills and Opportunity for the New American Workforce, supported by the Walmart Foundation. The program includes both face-to-face learning and online instruction targeting workers with limited English language proficiency (approximately 10% of the US workforce). Target-ing retail, manufacturing, transportation, accommodation

and food services, the program responded to employer concerns that limited language skills were blocking pathways to mid-skilled roles and thus impeding retention. The project included local instruction partners across the country to deliver the training in each region at the worksite or on campus. The preliminary evaluation suggested significant benefits for workers who not only improved their language skills but also their digital skills. The majority of the participants demonstrated improved English skills (83% in Miami, 91% in Houston, and 67% in New York) and over 80% were on track to obtaining higher wages. Employers reported improvements in job performance (95%) in store productivity (89%) as well as in retention (100%) (National Immigration Forum, 2016). With labour and skills shortages currently at the forefront for many businesses, there is a renewed interest in innovative workplace-based programming to support pathways for newcomers.

SOCIAL LEARNING AND INFORMAL LEARNING CIRCLES

Research has shown that engendering a sense of belonging is critical to encouraging performance of English as a Second Language (ESL) (Lacosse, et. al., 2020). Students in a university setting have demonstrated similar findings as other newcomer populations. Community organizations also offer support to newcomers learning English and French. For example, the Syrian Canadian Foundation's English Tutoring Program (ETP) is a unique service catering to vulnerable newcomers, offering personalized classes to those who are not able to access traditional language training – including people with health issues, workers with irregular hours, seniors, and parents without access to daycare. Since 2016, ETP has provided nearly 20,000 hours of personalized language support to 600 newcomers. In a survey of one cohort of newcomers, 90% expressed that their confidence in speaking English had improved. Additionally, 95% of respondents indicated that they would recommend the program to other newcomers.

In the United Kingdom, a large-scale randomized control trial of community-based language training aimed at people with very low levels of functional English proficiency examined the impact of guided learning and support delivered through 22 classes and 11 club sessions over an 11-week period for 527 participants (Patel et al., 2018). Participants' English language proficiency and social integration were measured at the beginning and end of the intervention period. The intervention was delivered by a consortium of partners led by Manchester Talk English (part of Manchester City Council) across five local authorities. The findings showed significant improvements in English language acquisition as a result of the intervention as well as progress in several areas pertaining to social integration, including: confidence in engaging with public services, levels of trust in other people, and number of social interactions and friendships formed.

DEFINING, ASSESSING, TRACKING AND REWARDING LANGUAGE LEARNING COMPETENCIES

One of the most significant barriers, particularly to adult language learners, is the time and commitment required to succeed. Many learners face multiple barriers, including trauma, confidence, access to technology, as well as the time and other resources needed to invest in learning. The process needs to start with careful assessments of learner needs and to harness a range of tools to both track and demonstrate progress as well as to reward and acknowledge success as retention is one of the most significant challenges facing ESL programs particularly those targeting adults.

CONCLUSION

Proficiency in English or French are critical to the success of newcomers to Canada and there are opportunities to use evidence-based innovations to maximize impact for learners.

Technology can provide more convenient anytime/anyplace access while also offering more customization and self-paced approaches. But many newcomers do not have access to high speed internet or computers so scalability for example to smart phones is critical to extend access. While technology can also provide more opportunities for practice and "richness" to experiences, it is only one dimension of innovation with language training, pedagogical design, relevance and intangibles like "fun" are essential. With the support of employers, work-integrated learning can better align the priorities of employment and language training through innovations like establishing on-site language instruction at work, or developing curricula that more accurately reflect real-world professional experiences. Additionally, more informal approaches to providing conversation circles, mentoring and tutoring can offer high levels of customization in a safe environment as well as helping to build the networks and social capital that are critical for employment success. Finally, harnessing lessons from behavioural economics to track and reward progress, to provide nudges and follow up, to recognize achievement often are critical to promoting engagement, practice and retention as well as providing evidence of achievement and mastery of competencies.

It is clear that no one size fits all program can work for everyone – age, education, literacy, and other individual factors play a role, as does the mother tongue – but we need to better understand how best to meet the needs of newcomers while supporting other aspects of integration including access to employment and social networks. More systematic reviews of different approaches and exploration of innovative models are critical given the uneven results our current investments are producing.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A PATHWAY TO INTEGRATION

INTRODUCTION

When choosing a career path, many see starting a business as one of the riskier options available. Maintaining success as an entrepreneur is notoriously difficult: in Canada, only 63% of new businesses survive after five years, and just 43% persist after ten (Government of Canada, 2018). These challenges are even more severe for specific groups of entrepreneurs, including newcomers, who must adapt without the resources and networks often available to people born in Canada (Cukier et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2014; Wayland, 2011).

Despite the danger of failure, researchers have noted that newcomers choose entrepreneurship more frequently than other working-age Canadians (Dheer, 2018; Ng & Gagnon, 2020). Studies have suggested that the proportion of immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada is on the rise – numbering three times greater than their representation in the general population (Hou & Wang, 2011; Langford et al., 2013). While some are "pushed" to entrepreneurship because they are excluded from the workplace, many others are "pulled" to entrepreneurship and would choose it over other career opportunities (Hou & Wang, 2011).

Entrepreneurship should not only be understood as a simple source of income for newcomers. By embarking on the entrepreneurial journey, immigrants develop the critical skills, confidence, and social networks that help facilitate their overall integration and sense of belonging, even if they do not end up starting a business. Entrepreneurial training thus serves as a form of experiential learning that can be harnessed by service providers to support newcomers' transition into Canadian life. Moreover, for many newcomers, it offers the

added benefit of building a sense of self-efficacy which, particularly for men, can have significant psychological benefits compared, for example, to sitting in a classroom. The settlement sector is only at the nascent stages of leveraging this potential, as it is still seen as a niche service within the immigrant skills development ecosystem (Cukier et al., 2021).

> " As a first step towards promoting entrepreneurship training as a viable pathway to newcomer integration, we explore four successful pilot programs in order to extract best practices that can be replicated and scaled up across the sector."

As a first step towards promoting entrepreneurship training as a viable pathway to newcomer integration, we explore four successful pilot programs in order to extract best practices that can be replicated and scaled up across the sector. The article outlines the ways in which these pilot programs address the specific barriers immigrants face when pursuing entrepreneurship, while also highlighting results and achievements related to acquiring skill sets and networks that are important for overall integration.

WHY IMMIGRANTS CHOOSE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BARRIERS

Many newcomers to Canada see entrepreneurship as a desirable and flexible career opportunity (Business Development Bank

of Canada, 2019; Cukier et al. 2017). Data gathered from across the country reveal that a significant proportion of newcomers pursue entrepreneurship during their integration process; either instead of, or in addition to, other forms of employment (Momani, 2016). Statistics Canada has reported high rates of entrepreneurship among multiple categories of newcomer: 16.8% of refugees and 30% of family class immigrants start their own business soon after arrival (Green et al., 2016). In Ontario, 34.7% of all start-ups across the province are established by first-generation immigrants (Davis et al., 2013; Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

The number of newcomer entrepreneurs in Canada is growing rapidly: from 205,400 in 2006 to 251,600 in 2018 – a 22% increase in 12 years (Business Development Bank of Canada, 2019).

Yet there are many barriers for newcomer entrepreneurs to overcome in Canada, such as a lack of institutional resources, business networks, and language competency upon arrival (Cukier et al., 2017). Their success is also hampered by various types of discrimination, including bias in competitions and screening processes (Balachandra et al., 2013; Clark, 2008; Huang et al., 2013; Ley, 2006; Schlosser, 2012; Sim, 2015). Research has also shown that immigrants use entrepreneurship as a way to circumvent career issues, such as dissatisfaction with salary and type of employment; particularly when their foreign credentials and work experience are not recognized or devalued in the Canadian labour market (Bauder, 2003; Teixeira & Lo, 2012; Wayland, 2011). In a survey of newcomer entrepreneurs (Hou & Wang, 2011), 33% reported choosing self-employment because of a lack of suitable paid jobs – much higher than Canadian-born workers at 20%.

For women, the entrepreneurial journey is even harder, with research showing that women often lack access to the mentorship, sponsorship, network, and social capital that contribute to success (Cukier & Chavouski, 2020; Orser et al., 2019). A Statistics Canada report showed that newcomer women in particular are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, when compared to Canadian-born women, despite, on average, reporting higher levels of education (Hudon, 2015).

This research suggests that Canadian business practices can be exclusionary to newcomers, who may need additional support in accessing alternative pathways to employment. Entrepreneurship can be a viable pathway to personal empowerment and economic success, but only if it is better supported and made more accessible to newcomers on the margins of the job market (Cukier et al., 2017; Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

NEWCOMER ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING PILOTS

To lower barriers to successful integration through entrepreneurship, several pilot programs have been developed specifically for newcomers in Canada. The following four – namely, the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE-Hub), Newcomer Entrepreneurship Hub (NEH), Boss Women, and the Workforce Innovation and Inclusion Project (WIIP) – illustrate how entrepreneurship training can play an integral role in supporting the success of newcomers.

1) WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP HUB (WE-HUB):

WE-Hub is a hands-on training program designed to reduce barriers to entrepreneurship for low-income, self-identifying women, including newcomers. In partnership with Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto, WE-Hub provides the tools and resources that women need to start their own business.

The program has multiple objectives including:

- Increasing entrepreneurial skills in women,

- Facilitating access to business financing resources,

- Offering concrete business testing opportunities, and

- Building social capital through networking opportunities and mentorship.

WE-Hub provides participants with training led by industry professionals and faculty from the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University. Women entrepreneurs are matched with business mentors and offered no-risk market testing opportunities. To ensure ease of access to programming, WE-Hub provides essential "wraparound" supports – including counselling referrals, settlement services, literacy support, transit fees and childcare – that enable women to participate fully in the program.

The curriculum incorporates training and workshops on the Business Model Canvas, Business Law, Finance and Accounting, and Social Media and Marketing, as well as other content related to running a successful business. Over the course of several consecutive weeks, and through learning how to develop and communicate their business plans, participants develop general business skills, a better understanding of finance and regulations, marketing and customer service skills, while improving their personal skills such as writing and time management.

Participants come from a diverse pool of aspiring entrepreneurs. Of the 200 women that participated in WE-Hub, almost half (48%) self-reported as belonging to a vulnerable community, including LGBTQ2S+, racialized people, persons with a disability, and Indigenous Peoples. About one quarter of these participants (24%) are newcomers to Canada.

Perhaps one of the most valuable components of the program pertains to the diversity of instructors, the majority of whom identified as women (79%) and racialized (63%).

Survey results showed a positive correlation between intentional recruitment of racialized and women instructors and workshop satisfaction rates. Learning from instructors with similar life experiences instilled a sense of confidence in participants about what they can accomplish.

In 2021, WE-Hub entered its fourth year of programming, and has helped women entrepreneurs who completed the program reach several milestones while improving their networks and skill sets. According to survey results:

- 81% of participants gained stronger personal networks and connections;

- 77% of participants increased their knowledge and skills;

- 56% of participants were matched with a business mentor;

- 47% of participants accessed a business testing opportunity;

- 43% of participants started a new business.

> **SUCCESS STORY:** Janelle had an idea in mind, but didn't know how to get started until she joined WE-Hub, where she was able to bring her business to life. Fusion Fit Foods sells delicious "protein bites" through a successful online store. Janelle recently won the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce's "Ethnic Food Incubator Program" Pitch Competition, receiving $5,000 for her business.

2) NEWCOMER ENTREPRENEURSHIP HUB (NEH):

In partnership between Ryerson University's Diversity Institute and Scadding Court Community Centre, NEH is a training initiative that provides a pathway to entrepreneurship for newcomers who want to start a business. The program provides participants with practical entrepreneurship training, opportunities to test their products or services, as well as mentorship support. The aim is to equip newcomers with resources and opportunities needed to establish a permanent business. A total of 175 newcomers have participated in the program since 2018, with the majority being women – 53% in the first year and 67% in the second year. NEH participants come from all over the world, representing over 30 countries of origin.

Newcomers that completed the NEH program reported several notable outcomes of the project:

- 75% of participants increased their skills and knowledge;

- 70% of participants matched with a business mentor;

- 68% of participants gained stronger personal networks and connections;

- 43% of participants accessed a market testing opportunity;

- 43% of participants have started a new business.

Key to the success of the NEH program is that it is designed as a holistic development and support program. In addition to covering the basics of launching a start-up, training also includes soft skills that are fundamental to Canadian business culture. Moreover, wraparound support services such as child-minding and translation are provided to maximize participation and access.

After this initial two-year pilot, NEH has been funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for a three-year development project. In this phase, NEH aims to work with about 180 newcomers, providing benefits such as mentorship from local entrepreneurs, business development workshops, and targeted services – including settlement support, translation, childcare, and language classes.

> **SUCCESS STORY:** Since completing NEH, Edinson has started InnScience, a business importing specialized medical equipment. He participated in the LatAm Start-up Accelerator in Toronto and then secured a spot at the Science Discovery Zone at Ryerson University. Edinson has continued to expand his business by creating an online platform with global reach for science researchers.

3) BOSS WOMEN:

Boss Women provides future skills and business training for Black women entrepreneurs through a boot camp format. This program offers instruction and mentorship through a network of successful entrepreneurs from the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA). Its participants are women who need extra support to launch their business, including people born outside of Canada (49%), who are single (56%), and who have children (56%).

Boss Women has been established by the BBPA and sponsored by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH).

With 10 regional hubs across Canada, WEKH is a key partner that can leverage a vast network of over 250 organizations, improving access to financing, talent, and expertise for around 100,000 women entrepreneurs.

After implementing three rounds of Boss Women in two years, supporting more than 800 women, the training program has received a high rate of satisfaction in participant feedback:

- 92% of participants reported that the training was relevant to their business development;

- 83% of participants stated that they increased their knowledge or skills;

- 45% of participants indicated that their network expanded after attending the program.

One of the biggest challenges facing Black women entrepreneurs is attributed to the lack of role models and success stories of people that look like them – "if you can't see it, you can't be it" (Elmi et al., 2021). In order to empower entrepreneurs to pursue their endeavours with confidence, they must also be able to identify with their mentors. What is therefore essential to the success of the pilot program is that it provided access to a network of successful entrepreneurs that participants shared similar life experiences with:

> "The BBPA Boss Women Entrepreneurship program made me feel like I could be an entrepreneur in a way that my business degree wasn't able to. Enrolling in the program meant joining a community of innovative Black women who champion and celebrate each other's ideas and business journeys. Learning from amazing professionals and experts that uplifted women of colour made me feel like I, too, could successfully grow and transform my business." – Boss Women program participant

4) WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND INCLUSION PROJECT (WIIP):

The Workforce Innovation and Inclusion Project (WIIP) brought together settlement agencies, diverse employers, and non-profits across Canada to explore innovative approaches to address the employment needs of recently arrived immigrants.

From 2018 to 2021, 12 pilot projects were tested by WIIP, seven of them focused on entrepreneurship training. A total 585 newcomers participated. Examples of these projects included:

- **PowerHack:** Led by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC), newcomers demonstrated their skills and expertise in intensive "hackathon" events, developing solutions to real-world problems chosen by participating technology employers.

- **The Skills for Change Immigrant Women's Social Enterprise:** Low-income newcomer women learned new skills and gained work experience through hands-on workshops and mentorship, as well as a seven-week job placement.

- **Cleaning Social Enterprise for Vulnerable Newcomers:** Piloted by the KEYS Job Centre in Kingston, Ontario, this program connected recently unemployed newcomers in the hospitality sector (due to COVID-19 closures) with local employers and entrepreneurs, aiming to establish a self-sustaining social enterprise for vulnerable newcomers.

The seven WIIP pilot projects featuring entrepreneurial training have received high satisfaction rates, with participants reporting that these pilot projects have enhanced their overall business skills in the following ways:

- 82% of participants stated that they acquired new skills to address the challenges of operating a business.

- 79% of participants indicated that the training was relevant to their business development.

- 68% of participants stated that their social networks expand as a result of the program.

- 32% of participants indicated that their business was growing as a result of participating in the program.

Important to the success of WIIP is its emphasis on collaboration and wide stakeholder engagement at the beginning stages. Pilot service providers focused on involving employers who were able to provide feedback on programming to ensure that the curriculum reflects skills they know to be in demand. Close collaboration between service providers and employers resulted in relationships and networks that newcomers benefitted from.

IMMIGRANT WOMEN START-UP CHALLENGE, HALIFAX AND NOVA SCOTIA

One of the WIIP pilots was the Immigrant Women Start-up Challenge, which offered newcomer women entrepreneurs an opportunity to present their business ideas to business leaders and win $5000 to develop it further. Pitch competitions were hosted across three cohorts in partnership with the Halifax Local Immigration Partnership (HLIP) and the Centre for Women in Business at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). Newcomer women participated in the free training program held over three Saturdays. The workshops offered skills training in business fundamentals including value

proposition, pitching, marketing, branding and financial planning. Each participant received six hours of one-on-one coaching sessions towards the development of his or her business idea into a business pitch in preparation for the final competition. Participants were matched with a mentor based on their individual needs.

The pilot project included extensive regional partnerships, with representatives from the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC), T.D. Small Business Banking, Credit Union, Arc Ignites Inc., Amplify Consulting, Digicel Branding and Marketing, Ashanti Leadership and Professional Development Services, Immigrant Services Associations of Nova Scotia (ISANS), Centre for Women in Business, Halifax Chamber of Commerce, Kisserup International Trade, East Coast School of Languages, T4G Consulting and Coaching, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Development, Recognize Your Potential, and People Can Biz.

While the sample was small, the majority (80%) indicated that they gained new skills to address the challenges of operating a business. All of the participants surveyed agreed that their social networks expanded by attending the program. Overall, 90% of participants who completed the survey were very satisfied with the program. Participants also reported that their business processes improved as a result of the support they received from their assigned mentor. Some noted that they gained new business partners and also improved management of their finances as a result of the program.

A major finding from the project was the importance of wraparound supports such as childcare and transportation for the in-person sessions. Other features that were important included the diverse and primarily women instructors, coaches, and mentors, many of whom shared lived experience with the participants. There were a number of improvements recommended to allow more convenient access to learning on their own time (e.g., taped sessions) as well as use of online matching to mentors. With the pandemic, access to the technology became an issue as did juggling unpaid work (childcare and home schooling) with participation in the program.

SUCCESS STORIES

There have been several success stories emerging from participants of the program. Ha Le won the pitch prize for the first cohort for her company, Midyat Tailor, a textile and fashion design business. The business model she presented, upcycling clothing items and thus diverting them from landfills, with a delivery service available to clients with accessibility needs, made her a competitive service provider in the textile and fashion design sector in Halifax. Ha Le was able to open her business in less than three months of winning the competition.

Apie D'Na won the pitch prize for the second cohort for her business idea the Wigologist, which makes customized wigs for Black women in Nova Scotia. Wigologist has officially opened, but kept online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Apie D'Na became a hairdresser in Nova Scotia out of need. She discovered quickly that the market for hair in Nova Scotia did not cater to women of colour and that there was a growing demand for hairdressers that understood their needs. It became her mission to learn the craft and provide the service to other women of colour in the region.

Taina Barrionuevo, an e-commerce consultant and owner of Not Just a Pretty Interface, won the pitch prize for the third cohort. Her company helps small businesses to integrate their products and services to an e-commerce platform. She has noted that for the first time, she has the capacity to hire two full-time employees in her marketing company.

CONCLUSION

The success of newcomers and women in these pilot programs has shown that entrepreneurship training not only helps immigrants to start businesses, but can also impart key skills that are transferable to different aspects of integration and labour market participation in Canada.

Providing "wraparound" supports for these programs ensures that all newcomers – particularly racialized women – have the resources they need to learn about business, while accommodating their other commitments during integration into Canada. These pilots have found that key supports for newcomer entrepreneurs include:

- Translation and Interpretation Services

- Childcare Services

- Transportation Support

- Settlement Services

A recurring output embedded into the evaluation metrics of all four pilot programs pertains to access to market testing opportunities. This enables entrepreneurs to gauge the market's response and obtain customer feedback, thereby minimizing their risks before fully launching their product or service. Access to these opportunities is particularly integral for entrepreneurs who have limited funding support. Access to funding opportunities is another important element in entrepreneurial training programming, as limited financial resources are a significant obstacle to immigrants launching their businesses.

But perhaps one of more beneficial components across the

pilot programs pertains to mentorship support and networking opportunities, which not only help immigrants navigate Canadian business practices, policies, cultures and norms, but are also shown to increase their confidence and sense of what can be accomplished – especially if mentors reflect their background and experiences. For newcomers, confidence building is particularly important to offset what can be a demoralizing process of starting over in a new country and facing the various challenges of navigating the labour market.

Despite facing lack of support and access to key resources, immigrant entrepreneurs often have stronger entrepreneurial intent than Canadian-born counterparts and bring global knowledge and social capital of their communities to their ventures (WEKH, 2020). It is important that programs leverage and build upon their existing knowledge and skill sets to help them successfully establish and sustain their businesses. Through building on their existing capacities and tailoring programmatic design to respond to their specific business needs in addition to larger barriers to success, the pilot programs serve as important best practices that can be scaled up to support immigrants' integration into the Canadian economy.

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LESSONS FROM THE PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES – A CANADIAN INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

Private sponsorship of refugees is a significant Canadian social innovation now being replicated around the world. Beginning as a response to the crisis of Indochinese refugees following the war in Vietnam, private sponsorship is now a pillar of Canadian refugee settlement, responsible for helping more than 327,000 refugees find a new home in Canada since 1979 (Government of Canada, 2020).

While many faith-based and community groups continue to privately sponsor asylum seekers from around the world, the Syrian crisis in 2015 motivated Canada to commit to settling 25,000 Syrian refugees, which occurred within 100 days. Massive changes to government policies and systems were implemented in record time and 62,000 Syrians resettled in Canada through a combination of government and private sponsorship. This was mostly achieved in a matter of months, and more than half of the refugees were privately sponsored (Government of Canada, 2020). Grassroots organizations emerged with new partnerships, processes, and approaches that were enabled by novel applications of simple technologies and revealed opportunities to leverage and amplify government resources. While fragmented and sometimes undeveloped, these efforts signalled new opportunities to create an innovative "sharing economy" approach to supporting newcomers.

Not only has private sponsorship as a model of refugee resettlement been sustained throughout the past four decades, but it has expanded over time. Around two million Canadians have been personally involved in helping Syrian refugees come to and settle in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

Beyond Canada, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has embraced this model in the hopes of increasing refugee resettlement. Other countries such as Argentina, Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand, and Spain have implemented or committed to similar programs (Van Haren, 2021). Despite the model's broad implementation and impact, little research has examined private sponsorship.

This article examines the Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge as an example of effective social innovation and aims to identify best practices for future private sponsorship policy and implementation. While technological change has dominated discussions of innovation, researchers increasingly recognize that social innovation also has power. The term social innovation refers to "a new combination of practices in areas of social action, with the goal of better coping with needs and problems than is possible by use of existing practices" (Howaldt et al., 2014). Many social innovations can help governments achieve objectives in a more efficient manner by leveraging the resources and techniques of the private sector.

PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Canada currently has three programs for refugee resettlement: the Government Assisted Refugee program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, and the Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) program. Introduced in 1979, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program allowed private individuals and organizations to assume the responsibility of a refugee's resettlement. Facing pressure to act, the federal government developed the program to allow for the resettlement

of more refugees than was possible when the government alone provided all settlement services. With the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, the government implemented a 1:1 matching program – with one government funded refugee settled for every privately settled refugee. In just 18 months, more than 60,000 refugees were privately sponsored from 1979 to 1980.

While current discussions of private sponsorship often focus on financial costs, the responsibilities taken on by sponsors include financial, emotional, and social support. Financial responsibilities are clearly defined in government regulations and are roughly equivalent to social assistance rates. An individual or group sponsoring a family of four could be expected to provide approximately $27,000 (CAD), distributed over the first twelve months after arrival in Canada. These funds provide for the family's needs, including food, furniture, transportation and shelter for one year. Social support responsibilities require the sponsors to help newcomers' transition into a new country: finding an apartment, enrolling children in school, finding work, and choosing a family doctor among other essential support. The broad support sponsors are required to provide can create barriers for sponsorship: people with means often do not have time and people with time often do not have the means.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Private sponsorship works. Most refugees prosper and their children achieve social mobility via educational achievement and occupational status attainment. In fact, privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) have better outcomes than government-assisted refugees (GARs). While this can likely be attributed in part to higher levels of education, skills and language, some credit must also go to the social, emotional and cultural capital accessed through the networks of their private sponsors. This support enables them to navigate the "unspoken rules" and to get the support they need and to find jobs through informal job markets (Yu et al., 2007).

PSRs experience quick labour market integration upon arrival to Canada, especially when contrasted with other modalities. For example, the 2016 tax records report that 40% of adult Syrian PSRs reported employment earnings within their first months of arrival, compared to 5% of Syrian GARs and 15% of BVOR refugees. According to the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Settlement Outcomes Survey (2019), of the Syrians reporting they were currently employed, PSRs reported 60% employed, BVOR refugees reported 55% employed, and GARs reported 43% employed. Overall Syrians' employment earnings increased with time spent in Canada. Syrian GARs and BVOR refugees' social assistance usage in 2016 aligns with historical trends for resettled populations – 93% of

Syrian GARs and 88% of BVOR refugees reported social assistance usage in their first year in Canada, compared to 2% of PSRs (IRCC, 2019).

Refugees across modalities are not the same. They vary in their workplace experience, formal education, and language (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003; Bloch, 2008). For example, about 20% of government-assisted Syrian refugees had English or French language skills, compared with 67% of privately sponsored refugees. Less than 3% of Syrian GARs had a university degree, compared with 25% of those who were privately sponsored (Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017).

However, even controlling for these demographic and socioeconomic differences, PSRs advantage over GSA remains strong and long: 15 years after arrival PSRs have higher employment rates and earnings than GARs. According to one study, PSR employment rates (89% and 69% for men and women, respectively) in the first year after landing are 19 and 25 percentage points higher than their GAR counterparts, for men and women, respectively (Kaida et al., 2020). The difference in employment and earnings between PSRs and GARs is greater for refugees with less than a high school diploma than those with more education, suggesting that the PSR pathways are particularly beneficial for refugees with limited formal qualifications.

But the higher employment rates and earnings of PSRs does not mean that they are not subject to the structural and systemic barriers that affect immigrants at large. For instance, in-depth interviews of Syrian refugees such as doctors, pharmacists, and teachers, revealed frustration over slow recognition of foreign credentials, In the words of one Syrian mother who was a school teacher before emigrating to Canada:

> "I came here [to the Kitchener-Waterloo Region] believing that I would find work as a school teacher. But that has not happened, and no one really recognizes my training and experience anyway." (Ilcan & Connoy, 2021, p. 306).

CASE STUDY – THE RYERSON UNIVERSITY LIFELINE SYRIA CHALLENGE

New approaches to private sponsorship created innovative new combinations of resources to meet refugee needs. Launched in July 2015, the Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) program is an example of effective collaboration where universities harnessed the assets of post-secondary institutions to provide volunteer support, raise funds, and privately sponsor hundreds of Syrian refugees.

There were notable differences in RULSC compared to the traditional private sponsorship model. First, it leveraged technology to reach volunteers, crowdsource donations for

sponsorship groups, and broker online resources to support refugees in their resettlement journey – such as connecting job seekers with employers through Magnet's online job matching platform. Technology further aided in personalizing the experience for donors by connecting them to sponsorship groups and specific refugee families. Second, rather than having the private sponsorship group bear the brunt of the resettlement responsibility, RULSC harnessed the capacity of student volunteers and private sector organizations to provide critical post-arrival support. Third, the program was designed to be easy to navigate, and focused on removing roadblocks in order to engage "more than the usual suspects" rather than expecting sponsors to navigate complex forms or find access to resources. Lastly, RULSC relied on well-developed project management and reporting processes to set goals and monitor results.

> **Timing was critical. Citizen demand to sponsor privately reached new heights following the publication of young Alan Kurdi's tragic photograph in September 2015. RULSC harnessed this interest, and its user-friendly interface sought to demystify private sponsorship and made engagement simple."**

Timing was critical. Citizen demand to sponsor privately reached new heights following the publication of young Alan Kurdi's tragic photograph in September 2015. RULSC harnessed this interest, and its user-friendly interface sought to demystify private sponsorship and made engagement simple: donations and volunteer registration was made with a click of a button, while sponsorship "teams" of five or more were matched with families based on the team's capacity. Unlike traditional approaches, this involved no training or workshop attendance, but instead matched refugee families and volunteer sponsors based on the skills and resources offered. By undertaking this "mass customization" approach, the program was equipped to mobilize and coordinate significant human and financial resources at rapid speed. More than 4000 individuals provided donations generating more than nearly $5 million in a very short period of time. Over 1000 individuals registered to volunteer and nearly 150 refugee families were sponsored (RULSC, 2016).

The RULSC program not only mobilized large numbers of people but also a diverse coalition of groups across different sectors. Whereas the traditional model treats sponsorship as a more or less individualized activity that is coordinated mainly by faith-based organizations, in the RULSC model, sponsorship is privately undertaken but collectively executed. Critical to the success of the program was the partnerships with students and organizations seeking to hire Syrian newcomers, as well

> **The impetus behind a cross-sectoral and community-based approach comes from the understanding that innovation flourishes where sectors converge and effective response to social problems requires breaking through silos between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. "**
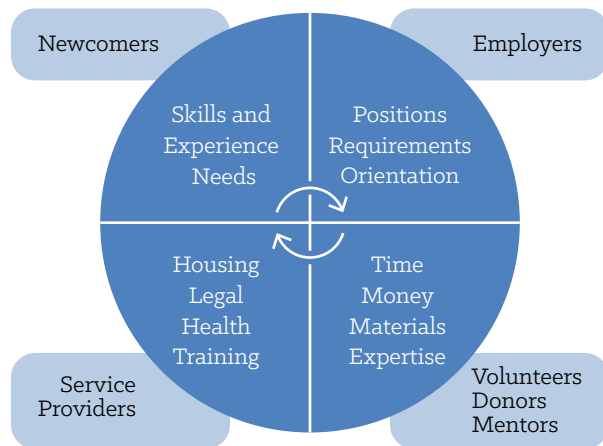
as the implementation of activities – such as job fairs and language training – that respond to research-identified newcomer needs. Student groups were encouraged to innovate and create new approaches and solutions through hackathons and competitions. The impetus behind a cross-sectoral and community-based approach comes from the understanding that innovation flourishes where sectors converge and effective response to social problems requires breaking through silos between the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

The RULSC model, implemented here to respond to a global refugee crisis, offers potential lessons to quickly and effectively mobilize and leverage additional resources. The goal is to more effectively address complex local and global crises and situations calling for urgent and challenging action. The model leverages student energy, existing university institutions, and the power of technology and crowdfunding. Its integrated yet decentralized network of persons, organizations, and resources responds to urgent needs.

The project reinforced the importance of undertaking a systems approach to dealing with social issues and to recognize that often the roadblocks are not due to the lack of capacity but rather political, organizational and behavioural policies and factors. In spite of this, the program, and a review of competitive technological solutions has helped inform the development of functional specifications for a global sharing economy platform to link refugees without homes to people willing to welcome them and, perhaps even more importantly, to leverage financial resources and human capital needed to support them.

> **Our experience with Indochinese refugees in 1979-80 and Syrian refugees in 2015 showed the power of innovation to harness the resources of civil society and the private sector to augment the resources of government and community organizations to help with the resettlement of refugees."**

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our experience with Indochinese refugees in 1979-80 and Syrian refugees in 2015 showed the power of innovation to harness the resources of civil society and the private sector to augment the resources of government and community organizations to help with the resettlement of refugees. The Federal Liberals, who began the campaign in third place, campaigned on the promise of bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of 2015. The campaign was charged with pro- and anti-immigrant rhetoric, but the Liberals were ultimately victorious.

There can be little doubt that setting an aspirational goal and strong leadership helped fuel a "whole of government approach" to implementation that allowed more refugees to find new homes in Canada faster than anyone thought possible. Not only did departments work together to align on-the-ground supports with vetting and approval processes and settlement services, but the process was modified as it unfolded. Collaboration at all levels and jurisdictions – internationally, nationally, and more locally – was key to the speed and success of the resettlement initiative. Waiting for UNHCR designation was an impediment, so Canada accepted a prima facie designation of Syrians as refugees and harnessed the networks of community organizations to help identify candidates. Canada also set up local processing sites in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey with more flexibility in documentation requirements. Under the leadership of Canada's Border Security Agency, a multilayer security screening process was developed and deployed to meet operational timelines. The Minister also encouraged active engagement by the private

sector and civil society to complement the work of established settlement agencies. By defining and focusing attention on a single goal – bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in 100 days – and challenging the status quo, Canada drove collaboration and innovation to accomplish what many thought was impossible (Government of Canada, 2019).

On a much smaller scale, the RULSC project showed the power of an entrepreneurial approach, of harnessing the power of citizens and of corporations to complement the work of government, settlement agencies and community organizations. It also demonstrated the often-untapped potential of youth – postsecondary students accounted for more than 500 of the volunteers that supported the initiative, providing everything from translation, to help with housing, education and navigating the health care system and even financial literacy and job searching. In the end, the program helped sponsor almost 500 Syrian refugees from widely diverse backgrounds (RULSC, 2016). Some had not completed high school, while others had PhDs. Five years later, many are now Canadian citizens. While not all have regained the status they lost when they left Syria, the group includes entrepreneurs, professionals, a dentist, now practising in Newfoundland, and many with steady work. Others have returned to postsecondary education. The children have done very well, including some with disabilities that would probably have severely limited their opportunities in Syria. Many have also sponsored their extended families – one family of four is now a family of five and has brought 12 members of their extended family to Canada, all of them employed. Many sponsors, including the Mayor of Toronto, John Tory, will say it was a life-changing experience and that the sponsors got more from the relationships than the refugees.

> **"Many involved in the project came together to create Lifeline Afghanistan, hoping to apply the lessons learned to a new humanitarian crisis and to help support Canada's commitment to resettle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees."**

Like many small scale "frugal" innovations, the long-term impact of RULSC is uncertain – will it drive change or will systems that protect entrenched interests and processes work to reinforce the status quo? (Chalmers, 2013.) For example, the policy structures which separated GARs and PSRs were sacrosanct leaving RULSC in the paradoxical position of having more sponsors and funds than "available" refugees (Keung, 2016). Many involved in the project came together to create Lifeline Afghanistan, hoping to apply the lessons learned to a new humanitarian crisis and to help support Canada's commitment to resettle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees.

While there are differences, lessons learned from the RULSC experience could and should inform government strategy to fulfill its commitment to sponsor Afghan refugees. But even beyond the support for refugees, the experience shows the value of social capital in helping with the resettlement process. Whether someone is a government-assisted refugee, a privately sponsored refugee, a blended visa office refugee, an economic immigrant, a temporary foreign worker or international student, many of the same principles apply. Navigating the settlement process, housing, education, health care and employment as well as acclimatizing to Canadian culture and expectations, is greatly facilitated by having social capital whether composed of relatives or sponsors. Finding ways to provide newcomers with a Canadian "family" has a significant impact on their social and economic success.

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