MAKING
RURAL COMMUNITIES
HOME

a vulnerable newcomer integration toolkit

Making Grey Bruce Home, a project by
United Way of Bruce Grey and
Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce

welcominggreybruce.ca

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Introduction

In January 2018, Making Grey Bruce Home was initiated by United Way of Bruce Grey in partnership with Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children, Communities and Social Services. This 14-month project developed, implemented and evaluated a rural service delivery model to enhance the capacity of communities and service providers to support the social and economic integration of refugees and vulnerable newcomers. This settlement service toolkit, published in 2019, is a culmination of the project.

By definition, a rural community is intrinsically different from an urban community in many aspects. For example, a rural community has a lower and more spread out population; and transportation is less convenient in rural communities because of the lack of public transport. Therefore, establishing a settlement service model for rural communities is not as simply as borrowing the urban model. Making Grey Bruce Home has identified and tested several effective tools to support newcomers' integration in rural communities, and is sharing them in this publication.

Making Grey Bruce Home has also published two training manuals. The Service Provider Training Manual 2019 and the Volunteer Mentor Training Manual 2019 are complementary to this toolkit. They are guidelines for organizations and agencies that would like to develop their own newcomer support training program for their frontline staff and volunteers. All publications are available for downloading on the Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce's website (welcominggreybruce.ca)

Acknowledgements

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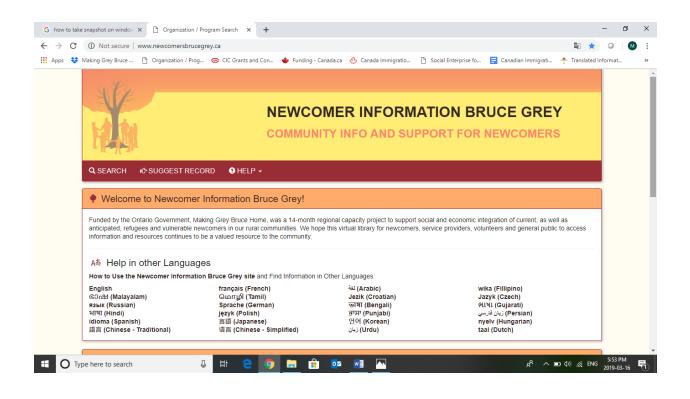
A Virtual information hub

Vulnerable newcomers often have multiple settlement needs, such as housing, language, health care, mental health, transportation, financial, employment, and education. It is important for them, and those who are supporting them (e.g. refugee sponsors, family members, volunteers, good neighbours) to have access to information about services that meet those needs. A virtual information hub is an online "one stop shopping" venue, where a person will find up-to-date information about services in their area such as a description of the service, where to access it, contact person etc. To ensure the accessibility for newcomers who experience language barriers, the hub needs to have a built-in translation function. Newcomer Information Bruce Grey (http://www.newcomersbrucegrey.ca) is an example of such virtual information hub.

The website was developed jointly by Making Grey Bruce Home (MGBH) and Information Bruce Grey. The search interface of the website draws its search result from the CIOC (Community Information Online Consortium) database of non-profit organizations, community groups and government agencies, which is used by the 211 phone service. The information in the database is updated every 6 months.

The Newcomer Information Bruce Grey website can be searched in 24 different languages. The choice of languages reflects the "mother tongues" spoken in Grey and Bruce County according to the Statistics Canada 2016 Census report, and the ESL (English as a second language) /ELD (English Language Development) survey of the Bluewater District School Board in Spring 2018.

The category and subcategory names are displayed in both the selected language and English. This enables those who are supporting the newcomers to assist them in using the website.

Newcomer Information Bruce Grey is an innovation because of its ability to provide up-to-date information in multiple languages. Being in its first generation, the website is far from perfect. For example, some newcomers who have tested the website expressed that the translation was a little "awkward" but understandable; also, the website does not have the ability to focus its search result on a specific community when the search is being done in a language other than English. We will continue to work on its functionality to streamline the process of getting to the information needed.

Tools to build community capacity

Newcomer integration is a two-way street. While newcomers need to learn how to navigate the system, the community has a role to play in increasing its capacity to reduce barriers. The tools to build community capacity which Making Grey Bruce Home has implemented and evaluated are community mapping, rendering of direct services, and partnering with organizations/agencies on pilot programs.

Community mapping is a process encompassing the entire region through which services and service gaps, community strengths and challenges are identified. The process includes consultation with frontline staff of the service sectors and government agencies, and volunteers from community organizations, focus group meetings with newcomers, and stakeholder consultation with managers and

executives of service providers, municipalities and counties, and employers. Community mapping includes everyone, from various levels, who is involved in supporting newcomer integration at all levels.

Provision of direct services is a community capacity building tool the importance of which cannot be over-emphasized. In the rural community settlement service delivery model, the settlement worker should:
- o   meet a newcomer where they are (including geographically in order to reduce the barrier presented by the lack of convenient transportation),
- o   connect them with needed services and
- o   advocate for them when there is service gap or barrier.

This approach demonstrates to newcomers how to access services, and to service providers how to effectively support newcomers. It also demonstrates that the needs of the newcomer are put first. Eventually, the newcomers will gain confidence and knowledge in navigating the system and advocating for themselves, and service providers will become more sensitive and responsive to the newcomers' needs.

Partnering on pilot programs is a way to assist organizations and agencies in expanding their capacity to address service gaps. Some organizations may already be offering services from which newcomers could benefit, for example services that support new mothers. However, existing programs may not be accessible to newcomers because of barriers they experience (e.g. language). In the rural community settlement service delivery model, the settlement worker assists organizations in developing, implementing and evaluating pilot programs that bridge the service gaps.

Making Grey Bruce Home has facilitated a very successful newcomer mother-child pilot program in Owen Sound in conjunction with Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services for a group of 10 mothers from 6 different cultural backgrounds, who have children under 14 months old. In a pre-program focus group meeting, the participants identified their needs and areas of interest. The activities of the 13-week program were jointly designed by the MGBH worker and Keystone workers, according to the information collecting at the focus group meeting. The pilot program was evaluated by both the participants and the Keystone workers as very successful, and has been instated as an ongoing Keystone program.

Tools to build social connections

Lack of social connectedness increases a newcomer's vulnerability and feeling of isolation. Rural communities often do not provide enough inherent opportunities for social connections. Therefore, the rural community service delivery model needs to include tools which will help newcomers connect with people of their culture, other newcomers, and community members who take an interest in making friends with newcomers and supporting them.

Communities in rural regions are generally spread out, and most communities do not have enough newcomers from the same cultural background to establish a formalized ethnic association. Because they are few in number, it is a challenge for newcomers, especially those who experience transportation barriers, to find others nearby who speak the same language, eat the same food or practise the same traditions. In the rural community settlement service delivery model, the settlement worker connects

the newcomers with local champions or informal cultural groups. Making Grey Bruce Home has successfully connected newcomers with active community members who share their Chinese, East Indian and Russian backgrounds.

Group programs that bring newcomers of diverse cultural backgrounds together can be another social connection tool. Despite the differences in language and culture, newcomers find common ground in their experiences, needs, and the challenges they face. A group program focusing on specific interest or needs creates an environment where newcomers support each other and build friendship. The newcomer mother-child pilot program mentioned earlier has connected 10 newcomers from Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean backgrounds. ESL programs conducted locally are another example.

Food always brings people together. Community dinners are great opportunities for newcomers and community members to connect. Set the community member/newcomer ratio in such a way that the number of one group does not overwhelm that of the other, so both groups will feel comfortable at the event. A Dinner & Social which Making Grey Bruce Home organized in Owen Sound brought 84 people together. One-third of the attendees were community members, and two-thirds were newcomer families from 11 different cultural backgrounds. Entertainment was provided for the children present. The event was rated as highly successful by all who participated.

Sometimes, a newcomer may already have a support network. In that case, you will need tools to strengthen and expand the network to ensure that it will be able to provide the support the newcomer needs to overcome the identified challenges. For example, Making Grey Bruce Home worked with a young woman who was expecting and about to become a single mother. Although she had a group of friends who were very supportive, and had connected her to some needed resources, there were things they were not able to help with. Making Grey Bruce Home organized a baby shower for the newcomer, and invited her friends, as well as three community members with experience in women issues. The newcomer maintained connection with the community members who offered support and advice throughout her pregnancy.

Service provider training manual

Through consultations with service providers, a survey of frontline staff, and consultations and direct services with vulnerable newcomers, Making Grey Bruce Home identified the training needed by frontline staff in different service sectors and government, to enable them to work with newcomer clients more effectively and with confidence. Topics covered in the training include:

- o Who are the refugees and vulnerable newcomers in the region?
    - An overview of different immigration categories
    - Demographics of current and anticipated refugees and vulnerable newcomers
    - Why do refugees and vulnerable newcomers come to the region?
- o How to support social, cultural and economic integration of newcomers
    - Understanding the newcomers' needs, and the challenges and barriers they face
    - What is cultural humility and how to practise it when working with newcomers
    - How to empower newcomers and what it means

- A "no wrong door" framework
  - Adopt a holistic approach and response to the multiple needs of the newcomers
  - Identify and address limitations within your own department/agency
  - Foster inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration
- Resources
  - The virtual information hub – Newcomer Information Bruce Grey
  - A list of regional and local services for quick reference
  - Translation and interpretation resources
  - Online resources
  - Training and knowledge development

Making Grey Bruce Home organized 5 training workshops for frontline staff from 40 different service providers, and 3 in-house training sessions for Bruce Grey Child & Family Services in-take workers, Grey County Social Services staff and Bruce County Human Services staff. A total of 183 individuals have received the training. Another Making Grey Bruce Home's publication, Service Provider Training Manual 2019, is a good reference for rural communities who want to develop similar training.

Volunteer mentor training manual

Volunteer mentoring is an essential component in supporting newcomer integration in rural communities, because some services are centralised and only available in the larger communities, and other service providers visit smaller communities only infrequently (e.g. biweekly or monthly). Volunteer mentors can provide support such as: determining where the needed services are available, driving newcomer to where the services are if necessary, helping the newcomers learn how to use the services available locally (e.g. grocery shopping or banking) or acting as an English tutor when the newcomers cannot access existing ESL programs. It is crucial that, while providing tangible supports, the volunteer mentors work with the newcomers and empower them to become independent.

There is a code of conduct which volunteer mentors need to follow. When working with vulnerable newcomers, volunteer mentors also need to be prepared to deal with situations and challenges which arise from the cultural differences. They also need to learn when to seek professional advice or intervention, for example, when a newcomer displays post-traumatic disorder.

Making Grey Bruce Home adapted the Good Neighbours Network Toolkit, written by the Good Neighbours Network in 2016, into a volunteer training manual (see Appendix II) that focuses on supporting refugees and vulnerable newcomers. It was tested in two training workshops in Grey Bruce and revised based on feedback from the workshop participants.

The training manual is a good reference for rural communities interested in training volunteer mentors to support newcomers. The topics included in the manual are:

- Could you be a mentor?
  - What do mentors do?
  - How to be a good mentor
  - How to become a mentor

- o Who are the refugees and vulnerable newcomers in the region?
  - An overview of different immigration categories
  - Demographics of current and anticipated refugees and vulnerable newcomers
  - Why do refugees and vulnerable newcomers come to the region?
- o Stages of mentoring
  - Get to know one another
  - Establish needs and wants with the newcomer
  - Develop a plan and check the plan together
  - Wrap up and celebrate success
- o Resources
  - The virtual information hub – Newcomer Information Bruce Grey
  - A list of regional and local services for quick reference
  - Translation and interpretation resources
  - Online resources
  - Training and knowledge development

The goal of the training was to recruit and train interested community members who would be later matched with newcomers. However, we discovered that in communities with low population, many communities are already supporting newcomers through their volunteer work with different organizations, such as the Beaver Valley Outreach, and the Big Brothers Big Sisters. Therefore, we recommend the training be offered to such organizations that have volunteers already working with newcomers. Another Making Grey Bruce Home's publication, Volunteer Mentor Training Manual 2019, is a good reference for rural communities who want to develop similar training.

Stakeholder consultation tools

Although vulnerable newcomers have arrived and made an effort to settle in the past, it was only in recent years that the number of those who want to make their home in a rural community has become significant enough to impact the service sectors. Presently, the mandates of many organizations and government policies do not reflect consideration of the barriers and challenges faced by vulnerable newcomers. It is important to involve management, executives and policy makers in order to provide effective settlement services in rural communities, where certain newcomer needs are exacerbated by the characteristics of rural communities, such as lack of convenient transportation, and lack of translation services.

Stakeholder roundtable discussions are a good way to engage organization and government to effect changes in mandates and policies. Ideally, some action items will be decided on at each discussion to ensure progress. Discussions can be held quarterly, and supplemented by periodic progress surveys.

Online resources

The list below provides some examples of online references. They contain useful information to help us understand the settlement needs of different groups of newcomers and how to connect newcomers to the needed services in rural settings. Some websites provide training opportunities. Links to Grey Bruce local resources are contained in the two training manuals, which are complementary readings to this toolkit.

Canada Immigration Newsletter
https://www.cicnews.com/

Community Capacity Building, a practical guide
https://www.scribd.com/document/95523387/Community-Capacity-Building-a-Practical-Guide

Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Project
https://irmhp-psmir.camhx.ca/

LearnAtWork Online Learning – contains a collection of online learning courses created and hosted by OCASI (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants). The topics are mainly on skills in working with newcomers.
https://ocasi.org/learn-work

Lifeline Syria
http://lifelinesyria.ca

Settlement.Org – contains information and resources for newcomers to Ontario, and a discussion forum for newcomers to share experience or ask questions. Settlement and orientation information can be read in a variety of languages.
www.settlement.org
https://settlement.org/translated-information/

Together Project – a Toronto-based initiative to connect Government-assisted newcomers with Canadians for friendship and support as part of an effort to build stronger, more inclusive communities.
https://togetherproject.ca/matching/#resources