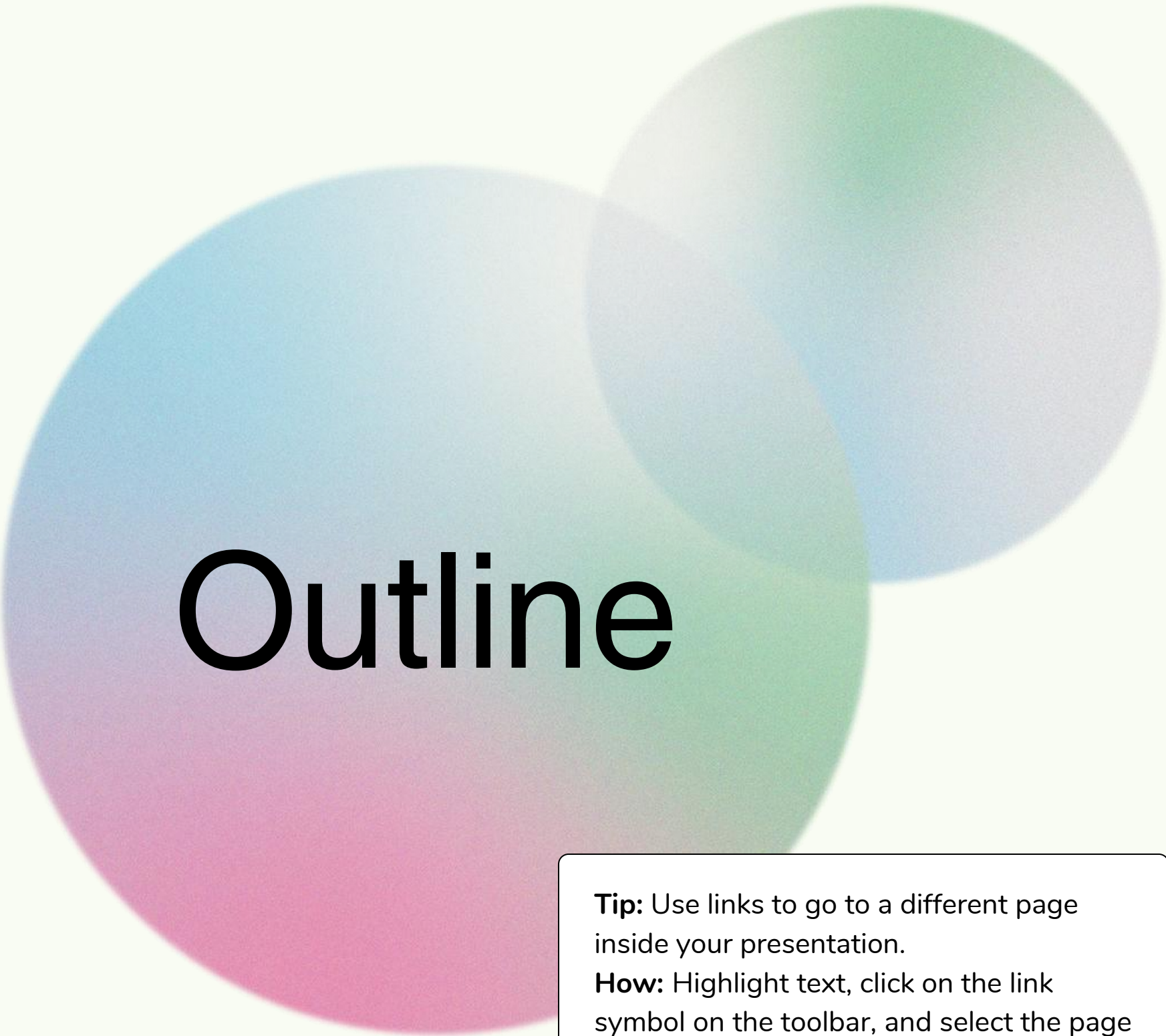


Service Delivery Principles in Toronto's Shifting Multicultural Settlement Service Sector

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Outline

Tip: Use links to go to a different page inside your presentation.

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- [Introduction](#)
- Research Abstract
- Service Provider Findings
- Service User Findings
- Conclusion

Define: Service Delivery Principles

- Emphasize collaboration, equity, responsiveness, and cultural safety (Dhillon et al., 2023; Caxaj & Cohen, 2021).
- Encourage integration across systems and partnerships to avoid fragmentation (Pepler & Kinsman, 2025).
- Recognize relationships as foundational to effective, equitable service delivery

Purpose of the Study

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#1

To explore how Service Delivery Principles are lived and practiced by service providers and users in the settlement context.

#2

To examine how policy shifts influence the enactment of service delivery principles

#3

To understand how SDP can build stronger inter-ethnic relationships in the settlement sector, promote shared prosperity, and support newcomers' sense of belonging.

2023-2024 Policy Landscape

- Immigration caps have reshaped newcomer flows and service demands.
- Funding cuts and shifting priorities have strained the settlement sector.
- A pattern of “funding spikes and fades” tied to political attention cycles.



Case: Ukrainian Refugee Funding Cuts



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Ukrainian newcomers in 2023

“And it's been a very big topic to discuss between my colleagues with Afghan settlement workers who speaks Dari and Farsi because they said, like Canadian government, they give a lot of finances a lot of budget for Ukrainians but not for Afghan people.” (II SP #10, BT)

Ukrainian newcomers in 2024

“I worked with Ukrainians and now this stream will not be funded. So, 4,000 clients will be abandoned, right? Like what should we do with these clients? ” (FGD SP #3, BT)

Funding cuts create uncertainty and disrupt continuity of care

Service providers describe growing
ethical tension, loss of trust, and emotional fatigue.

“But if the funding is cut, or if the funding is reduced, what will happen to the services that you will give? They would say, oh, why are you not giving the services that you used to give since COVID time? What happened? **So you know the trust that we build already for, since COVID time, and now we are in 2024. Then, you know, the frustration, you know, from the faces of these workers is immense.**” (FDG SP #3, XQ)

“Because as everyone said, with limited funding, we often have fewer programs and services that we need. **And sometimes it's tough balancing high caseloads, for example, with clients which have unique needs. And this can be overwhelming. Especially when clients need more time, and I want to give them the support they deserve.**” (FGD SP #3, BT)

2026-2028 Policy Recalibration

New focus on sustainable immigration levels (IRCC, 2025)

- Reduced temporary resident arrivals
- Stabilized permanent resident targets
- Emphasis on labour market needs, Provincial Nominee Programs, and Francophone admissions
- Commit to humanitarian transitions

From Policy Mandates to Human Relationships

- SDP connects macro-level policy structures with micro-level relational work
- Supports providers in upholding trust, inclusion, and empathy under systemic constraints
- Strengthens inter-ethnic relationships through shared values of respect and equity.

Results

Service Provider (SP)

- Key findings from SP Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- Practices SPs identify as effective / working well
- Recommendations proposed by Service Providers (SPs)

Service User (SU)

- Key findings from SU FGDs
- SU perception of SPs and settlement services
- Services SUs identify as effective
- Issues faced by SUs
- Potential recommendations proposed by SUs

From the SPs' Lens

Key Findings

1. **Relationship-building** is deeply shaped by staff positionality and inter-ethnic dynamics.
2. **Language barriers**, together with **information asymmetries** and **misinformation from other actors**, as the most pervasive and foundational challenges.
3. **Structural disparities** between groups of newcomers and migrants, which intersect with ethnicity, status, and geography.
4. Organizations respond to the inter-ethnic dynamics through **multiple institutional strategies** in a **collaborative** and **inclusive** way.



1. Relationship-building is deeply shaped by staff positionality and inter-ethnic dynamics

- SP participants describe relationship-building with clients as an intentional, relational process that begins with formal intake and continues through ongoing interactions.

“When I meet a new client, intake questions help me map their situation, but trust develops when I slow down and really listen to their story.”

by TS (FGD SP#4, Nov 14, 2024)

- Workers recognize both **points of proximity** (e.g., shared country of origin, language, gender, age, or student/worker status) and **points of distance** (e.g., clients’ exposure to war, extreme precarity, or violence that staff have not personally experienced).

1. Relationship-building is deeply shaped by staff positionality and inter-ethnic dynamics

- Clients are understood as **multi-layered subjects** whose ethnic, gendered, and migration identities intersect in complex ways; no single identity marker is seen as sufficient to explain their experiences.

“Some clients’ experiences are far beyond my own, and I recognize my privilege in that. I do my best to respond with empathy, and to connect through whatever we share, culture, gender, age, or future goals.”

by TS (FGD SP#4, Nov 14, 2024)

2. Language barriers, information asymmetries, and misinformation from other actors

- Language barriers were the most frequently reported challenge in FGDs.
 - SPs noted that many clients have limited English proficiency, leading to **misunderstandings** and **miscommunication**.
- Persistent information gaps between formal policies and clients' understandings, together with **policy confusion** among both SUs and SPs, complicate service navigation.
 - e.g., some SUs expect SPs to know “everything” happening in government and pressuring SPs to give an answer
- SPs spend substantial time **correcting misinformation** circulating through ethnic networks, unregulated organizations, or extended family/friend circles.
 - e.g., refugees may trust a lawyer in their country of origin and expect SPs to follow that advice.

3. Structural disparities between groups of newcomers and migrants

- Lack of fundings is another common challenge raised by SP participants (i.e. **accommodations**, food, and language translation)
 - Migrant workers in rural or semi-rural contexts face language barriers (e.g., Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese speakers) and work extremely long hours “sun-up to sundown,” with limited time or energy to access services.

“We don’t have legal assistance or a settlement counsellor for 21,000 migrant workers here. Funding has been reduced, services are shrinking, and people ask, ‘Why aren’t you offering what you did during COVID?’ The trust we built is now turning into visible frustration.”

by XQ (FGD SP#3, Oct 28, 2024)

3. Structural disparities between groups of newcomers and migrants

- Refugees and others from war-torn or highly precarious contexts arrive with significant trauma histories and heightened **mental health needs**, often unmet in culturally appropriate ways.
- Newcomer families confront severe housing difficulties (i.e. long waitlists, guarantor requirements, shelter time limits), with consequences for **unstable** children's schooling and family environment.

3. Organizations use multiple institutional strategies in a collaborative and inclusive way.

- **Training and professional development**
 - Staff participate in sectoral training on settlement work, employment support, trauma-informed practice, and crisis management, alongside organization-wide sessions on conflict management, anti-Black racism, and gender identity and sensitivity.
- **Partnerships and internal collaboration**
 - Workers emphasize collaboration both within and across organizations (e.g., between settlement, employment, mental health, food bank, housing, and violence-against-women services).

3. Organizations use multiple institutional strategies in a collaborative and inclusive way.

- **Indigenous–newcomer relationship-building**
 - Some participants highlighted Truth and Reconciliation–aligned initiatives that position Indigenous peoples, settlers, and racialized newcomers in a triangular relationship, disrupting simple host–newcomer binaries and embedding integration within wider decolonization and reconciliation efforts.

“Through Calls to Action 94 we’re working with Friendship Centres so participants hear Canada’s dark histories and experience Indigenous culture and art—and it’s really been a lesson for us as well.”

by OT (FGD SP#3, Oct 28, 2024)

From the SPs' Lens

Practices SPs identify as effective / working well

Relational, client-centred work (SPs–SUs)

- SPs invest time to understand SUs' histories and identities, using shared language/experience while acknowledging differences to build trustful inter-ethnic relationships.

Orientation and community spaces

- Early, structured orientation in housing, health, and work plus festivals, language exchanges, and “family rooms” that reduce confusion and promote cross-ethnic belonging.

Strong collaboration and referrals

- Cross-sector and internal referral pathways (food banks, housing, mental health, employment, VAW) help provide more holistic, less fragmented support.

Equity-oriented and decolonial practice

- Training in trauma-informed care, anti-Black racism, gender diversity, and Indigenous–newcomer initiatives (linked to Truth and Reconciliation) strengthens SPs' capacity in complex inter-ethnic settings.



From the SPs' Lens

Recommendations

Enhance language and interpretation supports

- Allocate **stable funding** for professional interpreters, translation services, and dedicated interpreter lines.
- Formalize and support **bilingual peer and volunteer roles** to reduce over-reliance on ad hoc, informal intermediaries.
- Send **emails** to the clients prior to their appointment for clarification and avoid misunderstanding

Address structural barriers, particularly housing and legal supports

- As mentioned by some SP participants, solving the housing problem can solve **70%** of newcomers' problems.
- Advocate for increased affordable housing options and more coordinated **housing supports**.
- For migrant workers and other highly precarious groups, SPs recommend **expanded access** to legal assistance and settlement counselling outside major urban centres.

Recommendations

Improve access to culturally responsive mental health supports

Need further development in mental health services that are **trauma-informed**, **culturally and linguistically appropriate**, and coordinated with settlement work

Strengthen information accessibility and policy clarity

Expand and sustain **early-orientation programs** in multiple languages. Provide clear, up-to-date, and accessible explanations of policy changes (e.g., immigration, housing, labour) for both SUs and SPs to reduce information gaps and policy confusion.

Recognize SPs' struggles and support their emotional needs

Implement measures to manage caseloads, **provide supervision and debriefing**, and acknowledge the emotional and advocacy work involved in navigating racialized and structurally unequal systems.

Deepen anti-racism and decolonial practice

Continue and extend **anti-racism training**, including explicit attention to racialized authority and the internalization of whiteness, and further develop **Indigenous–newcomer initiatives** as part of a broader decolonial framework.

From the SUs' Lens

Key Findings

1. **Structural issues** significantly impact SU experiences
 - a. Housing
 - b. Job market
 - c. Legal status
 - d. Migration process bureaucratization
2. Experiences with **structural issues** lead to **strong reliance** on settlement services and SP expertise
3. SPs are perceived in the context of broader settlement service organization in terms of **physical space and programs/ services**



“it was like a lot of information, very confusing. So we make some errors, in that moment, when we were applying. And the thing is, we realize that we have to pay to a consultant or someone, if we want to, like, got it right in the first try, or else you are paying extra money for that. So that was frustrating.”

-M, FGD #1

“And then I call one day, and I was like, okay, I'm having this issue, I don't- like my husband already got the visa, and I didn't have it. And that's when they told me, oh, actually, the system has an issue”

-M, FGD #1

“I'm also try search administrative position, this manager, but I'm without permanent residence. I'm not citizen. I only have work permit,”

-UD, FGD #2

“I'm on a work permit. And you know, lately the policies have just been here and there and here and there. So I just trying to navigate where I stand in between all of those policies and how you know I really want to make Canada my my permanent home. I was so worried that day, like with all of the news. I, you know, taking a lot of those things in, and how to know what my fate was. And the fact that I needed to also get a job”

-GE, FGD #2

The Conflation of SPs, Settlement Services Spaces, Services/ Programs

- When asked about settlement services, SUs speak about SPs, settlement organizations, and programs with **little distinction between each other**
 - The **quality of individual SP care**, the support within **physical space**, is sometimes understood as a **reflection of the quality of the organization as a whole**

Why does this matter? What are the implications of this?

- This conflation highlights the **interconnected relationship** between individual SP support, the helpfulness of programs and, physical space
 - This interconnection enables SUs to **meaningfully address their grievances as individuals systemically situated in vulnerable positions** within larger structural migration processes and issues
- SPs perceived as **microcosm of the larger functioning** of a space that centres the needs of SUs
- Settlement service organizations as a **physical context** through which Canada and settlement is perceived and experienced by SUs
 - Settlement service organizations are **accessible, interactive physical “face” of a faceless migration bureaucracy**

Effective SP Skills and Settlement Service Programming

- SPs provided essential supports to help SUs navigate structural issues

“Because when I came...in June in August [settlement organization], it's service organization with any problem, with settlement, with English with job more and more problem. And this company helped me with looking [for] apartment in [local university] [to] live in [university residence], and I asked about...[settlement organization] help me continue live here without any problem.”

-UD, FGD #2

- SUs value SP **certifications and qualifications** in helping them **navigate complex migration processes**. SPs are viewed as people having the **expertise** needed to help navigate the migration system
 - SU diverting from reliance on co-ethnic knowledge enclaves, instead **prioritizing the expertise of SPs**

“ sometimes, you as a new immigrant, you rely on the comments about the immigration process from others, and that's a mistake...they don't have bad intentions, but they are not, like, immigration consultants, and they don't know the rules, and all the information that is available, and maybe they- their case is different from your case.”

“So right now, for the immigration, for the PR, we are like, we are trying to be careful, and we are going to have like assistance for our immigration process with somebody who is like certified for that matter”

-KU, FGD #1

Effective SP Skills and Settlement Service Programming (cont'd)

- In the context of larger, faceless structures creating difficult situations and emotional hardships for SUs, individual SP qualities of **kindness and attentiveness** are appreciated

“the people there are so warm, so warm, so warm, because I remember, for that very day I went there. I was really down like I was so like just really down with the way things are on that particular day, but when I got there I was able to get, you know, some sort of assistance that helped to oh make me happy for lack of better words.”

-GE, FGD #2

- SP support provides important **emotional support** necessary to provide SUs the ability to continue navigating structural and material issues

“So when I got there I told them my situation and I had 2 staff. Yes, there were 2 staffs that came around, and you know they just kind of demystified the whole situation and had me calm down like it's not the end of life. This could be done. This could be done. So they collected some of my information to know how they can assist me.”

-GE, FGD #2

Challenges and Critiques

Structural Issues

- SU critiques of SPs and settlement services have more to do with **structural issues** than individual SP skills and supports

“until you have everything you are not going to rest. Every year you have a new process. And right now, everything is changing, right? So, it's like, it's crazy, like you have to be very aware of everything, because the like minor things are changing, and then your whole process is changing.”

-M, FGD #1

- SP support is **limited within the confines of migration and settlement organizational policies**. Addressing structural issues is limited to structural confines.

“I think I went to and I forgot the name of the center. But they don't they don't attend to work permits holders, because right now I hold the work permit. So she directed me to the community center, where I got better service, where I got more services, and you know so they would have some workshops on LinkedIn, Cv, resume optimization and all of those things, and I would say that I have benefited from it”

-GE, FGD #2

Challenges and Critiques

Interpersonal

- SUs **Experiences** varying levels of knowledge and support that SPs bring and the how this differently impacts their applications

“But then it's like, no, like, it depends on the agent that is going to take your application. So, I think that's not fair, like it should be like the same for everyone.”

-M, FGD #1

- **Inter-racial and inter-ethnic dynamics** within SU-SP relations impacted SU experiences in terms of receiving support from SPs of other racial/ ethnic backgrounds
 - Consider the **role of whiteness** and racial/ ethnic hierarchies in ethnicized migrant spaces

“You know, actually... um... getting help. I actually didn't find it really easy, you know, getting help from um... you know, from ... I don't know I actually have the permission to say, um, the whites, because I'm a black skin man, yeah.”

-K, FGD #1

Recommendations

- Awareness of **structural issues** (e.g. constraints of legal status) and **power dynamics** (e.g. racial/ethnic hierarchies) impacting SU experiences
 - **Consider impacts of structures on inter-personal, inter-ethnic interactions**
- Provide **emotional support** (e.g. kindness and attentiveness)
 - **Humanize SUs** through an understanding of the layers of institutional and societal rules, policies, and structures that SUs are navigating
- Find **alternative forms of support** in the context of structural confines (e.g. referrals to community centres with less restrictions)
- Accomodate the **varied circumstances of SUs** (e.g. family-oriented supports)
- At the organizational level, **methods of ensuring that SPs hold similar levels of knowledge and expertise** and provide equitable supports to all SUs

“So you know having to experience that from someone that they could decide not to help, you know. But they were willing to help. They were willing to listen. Yeah, that was why I said, I really felt so happy that day”

-GE, FGD #2

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Thank you!

Do you have any questions?