

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

New Canadians Centre (NCC)
Peterborough, Ontario

Area of Practice:

- Promoting Welcoming Communities

Video:

<https://youtu.be/pKfHqFhdOuk>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

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PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

The New Canadians Centre (NCC) is a non-profit, charitable organization that aims to support immigrants and refugees in the City of Kawartha Lakes, Haliburton County, City and County of Peterborough, and Northumberland County. In 1979, the NCC began as a small organization called the Peterborough Newcomer Orientation Committee (PNLOC) to support refugees fleeing Vietnam. Over the years, the PNLOC expanded its goals and reach which led to the establishment of the NCC in 1987. The NCC's mission is to facilitate the meaningful economic, social, and cultural integration of newcomers into Canadian society. The NCC offers a range of programs and services, including language training, employment support, settlement services, and community engagement initiatives. As the host organization and lead agency for the Peterborough Immigration Partnership, the NCC also carries out community development work through a variety of initiatives.

Through its work with newcomers and the wider community, the NCC saw a need for more structured opportunities for community members to learn directly from newcomers about their experiences settling in Canada. Schools, churches, businesses, community groups, and other organizations were regularly asking the NCC to arrange presentations where newcomers could speak about their immigration and settlement experiences. Responding to these requests one at a time was difficult because each request required the NCC to identify someone willing to share their story, help them decide what they wanted to say, and support them to prepare for a public audience. The NCC also saw that these requests could serve a dual purpose. They could help community audiences better understand newcomer experiences, while also giving newcomers opportunities to practice English, build public speaking skills, make connections, and participate more actively in the community. The NCC therefore began developing public education programs that use newcomer storytelling as a structured way to support learning, connection, and dialogue between newcomers and the wider community.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

Public Education Programs

Description:

The NCC's public education programs include three related initiatives: the Living Library, Community Conversations, and Our Neighbourhood. Together, these programs use newcomer storytelling to help community members learn directly from newcomers' lived experiences and create opportunities for dialogue about immigration and settlement in Peterborough.

The Living Library, launched in 2018, is a multimodal storytelling program. Each year, the NCC runs a storytelling workshop series where newcomers reflect on their settlement experiences, build storytelling and public speaking skills, and craft stories that are meaningful to them. Some participants from this workshop series then become featured Living Library speakers and share their stories with community audiences through speaking engagements. Each speaker may also record their story in other formats, including radio and podcast recordings, as well as one- to two-minute video clips that introduce speakers who are available for live bookings. These video clips are used to

promote the program and may also be used by speakers in contexts such as job applications or other professional opportunities.

Community Conversations, launched in 2023, brings the NCC together with partner organizations to host discussions on specific themes related to immigration and newcomer experiences. These events create space for more in-depth discussion by bringing together people with lived experience, service providers, professionals, and academics to explore the topic from multiple perspectives.

Our Neighbourhood, launched in 2024, is a video series and discussion guide focused on newcomers' experiences of immigration, racism, and discrimination in Peterborough. The series features six individuals sharing their stories and is paired with a discussion guide developed in collaboration with an educator and diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant. The guide includes prompts and activities that support discussion in schools, organizations, community groups, and informal settings about the themes raised in the videos and what it means to be a good neighbour.

Goal(s):

The NCC's public education programs have two main goals. The first is to provide structured opportunities for newcomers to share stories that are meaningful to them, participate actively in the wider community, build connections, and develop networks. The second goal is to support public learning about newcomer experiences. By creating spaces where community members, organizations, and service providers can hear directly from newcomers, the programs aim to humanize immigration, foster greater understanding, and encourage more informed, welcoming, and responsive communities.

Target Client Group(s):

The programs serve both newcomers who share their stories and a wide range of community members and organizations who engage with them. Audiences include groups such as schools, post-secondary institutions, library patrons, faith groups, businesses, service providers, non-profit organizations, and community groups.

Delivery Partners:

Delivery partners vary depending on the program and specific event. Community Conversations have been delivered in collaboration with local organizations, such as the Peterborough Public Library, the ReFrame Film Festival, and Nine Ships 1825 Inc. For the Our Neighbourhood project, the discussion guide was developed by Rabia Khokhar, an EDI Consultant and Educator. The project was also supported by the City of Peterborough. The Living Library program is delivered solely by the New Canadians Centre while training in storytelling for newcomer speakers is delivered in collaboration with local artist Larel Paluck and the Peterborough Toastmasters.

Human Resources:

The public education programs are overseen by the Manager of Community Development and delivered by staff who coordinate, facilitate, and tailor the programs for different audiences. Program responsibilities are distributed across three team members within the Community Development team. Newcomer speakers, storytellers, panelists, and video participants are also key to program delivery.

Funding:

Staffing costs for coordinating these programs are funded through IRCC-LIP funding while program costs are primarily covered through self-generated funds, in-kind support from delivery partners, and specific grants. These grants include funding from Canadian Heritage's Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Program (MARP), with Our Neighbourhood funded by the Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program (CSMARI).

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

The NCC's public education programs are effective because they centre newcomer stories as the main tool for learning. Rather than presenting immigration only through facts or general information, the programs allow audiences to hear directly from newcomers about their own experiences of settlement, belonging, racism, discrimination, and community life. This helps put a human face to immigration and creates opportunities for audiences to better understand the experiences of newcomers in Peterborough.

The programs are also effective because they create opportunities for direct engagement between newcomers and community audiences. Through speaking engagements, facilitated conversations, panels, videos, and the discussion guide, participants are invited to listen, ask questions, reflect on assumptions, and discuss the themes raised by newcomer stories. This makes the learning process more interactive and grounded in real experiences.

Finally, the programs are effective because they serve both newcomers and the wider community. Newcomers are supported to share stories that are meaningful to them and to participate actively in community life, while audiences gain a better understanding of newcomer experiences and how they can create more welcoming and responsive spaces.

Efficient:

The NCC's public education programs are efficient because the same core materials and storytelling model can be used in several ways. Newcomer stories can be shared through live presentations, virtual sessions, podcasts, radio recordings, videos, and self-guided materials. This allows the NCC to reach different audiences without creating a new program for each request.

The programs also include resources that can be reused over time. For example, Living Library speaker videos can be used to promote speakers who are available for live bookings, while the radio and podcast recordings allow audiences to engage with the stories outside of a scheduled event. Similarly, the Our Neighbourhood videos and discussion guide can be used by schools, organizations, community groups, and individuals to lead their own discussions when NCC staff are not available to facilitate a session directly.

The programs can also be adapted through small changes rather than redesigned from scratch. NCC staff can adjust the language, examples, activities, delivery format, and depth of discussion while continuing to use the same core storytelling-based approach. This allows the NCC to respond to

requests from very different audiences while making efficient use of existing program materials and staff capacity.

Relevant:

The NCC's public education programs are relevant because they meet an ongoing need for practical learning about newcomer experiences. Community members, schools, organizations, and service providers may want to better understand immigration and settlement, but may not have direct opportunities to hear from newcomers, ask questions, and discuss these topics in a structured setting.

The programs are also relevant because they can be made appropriate for the audience in front of them. For younger children, NCC staff may use a short, relatable story and pair it with an arts-based activity, such as writing or drawing cards for a newcomer family. For post-secondary or professional audiences, the same storytelling approach can support more detailed discussion about the systems and issues that shape newcomer experiences.

The programs also address issues that affect newcomer inclusion in everyday community life, including settlement, belonging, racism, discrimination, and the systems that shape newcomer experiences. By tailoring the topic, language, and discussion format to the audience, the programs help different audiences engage with newcomer experiences in ways that are concrete, appropriate, and useful.

Sustainable:

The NCC's public education programs are sustainable because they are relatively low-cost and can continue with limited new resource demands once core materials have been developed. The main costs include speaker honorariums, transportation supports where needed, promotional materials, and audio-visual equipment. These costs can be reduced through partnerships, such as when partner organizations provide event space or other in-kind support. The programs are also offered free of charge, with donations accepted when organizations are able to contribute. Videos, podcasts, radio recordings, and the Our Neighbourhood discussion guide further support sustainability because they can be used repeatedly without recreating the materials for each audience or event. The discussion guide also supports partner-led events using existing materials, with financial support from the NCC (\$100 grant per partner).

Transferable:

The transferability of the NCC's public education programs has already been demonstrated locally at the Peterborough Public Library. It developed its own human library program with support from the NCC. More broadly, the model can be adapted by other organizations because it is built around a clear structure: identify newcomers who are willing to share their stories, support them to prepare those stories, and create opportunities for community audiences to listen, ask questions, and discuss relevant themes.

The model can be adapted for different community sizes, audiences, and topics, but it depends on strong relationship-building with newcomer speakers. Smaller communities may need to invest more time in identifying a diverse group of speakers, while larger centres may need to focus more on managing demand and tailoring sessions for different audiences. The main resources required are

facilitation and coordination skills, audio-visual equipment, speaker honorariums, transportation supports where needed, and time to prepare speakers and promote the events.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The NCC's public education programs are innovative because they combine public education with newcomer skill-building. Newcomers are not simply asked to speak about their experiences; they are supported to reflect on their settlement journeys, decide which stories they want to share, and develop their storytelling, public speaking, and presentation skills. This preparation helps ensure that newcomer stories are shared in a thoughtful and respectful way, while also creating concrete benefits for the speakers themselves.

The programs are also forward-thinking because they are designed for dialogue, not only passive learning. Through speaking engagements, facilitated conversations, question-and-answer periods, videos, and the Our Neighbourhood discussion guide, audiences are encouraged to listen, ask questions, reflect on assumptions, and discuss what the stories mean for their own schools, organizations, and communities. This interactive structure helps audiences engage more deeply with newcomer experiences while keeping newcomer voices at the centre of the learning.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

One definable feature of the NCC's public education programs is that they are delivered by a settlement organization that works directly with newcomers. This gives the NCC an existing foundation for identifying potential speakers, building trust, and supporting newcomers before, during, and after they share personal stories. The programs are connected to the NCC's client-facing work rather than being public education activities developed separately from settlement services.

High Client Uptake:

The public education programs have demonstrated high client uptake through strong demand from community audiences and partner organizations. The NCC regularly receives requests from schools, teachers, faith groups, businesses, libraries, community organizations, and other agencies that want presentations, conversations, or events focused on newcomer experiences. Since launching in 2018, the Living Library has facilitated 190 speaking engagements, reaching a total audience of 3,994 people. Since 2023, the NCC has hosted six Community Conversations, each generally attended by an average of 30 to 40 people. The Our Neighbourhood video series has also demonstrated strong uptake, with more than 22,000 views on Facebook. In 2025, six partners used the accompanying discussion guide to host their own group events exploring the themes raised in the videos.

High Client Retention:

The programs have demonstrated high client retention through repeated participation from both newcomer speakers and community audiences. Some newcomer speakers remain interested in participating after their initial involvement, including asking to stay on the speaker list, requesting additional opportunities, or participating in another NCC public education program. Audience members also return for multiple events, and teachers, schools, and partner organizations continue to request additional presentations and collaborations. This sustained engagement is supported by the NCC's use of different speakers, topics, and themes, which allows returning participants to engage with new content each time. In some cases, events that were originally planned as one-time sessions have continued or expanded into a series because of sustained community interest.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

Evaluation findings indicate that the programs are helping community audiences better understand newcomer experiences. Participants report that they value hearing directly from newcomers, appreciate having a structured space to ask questions, and feel more informed about what it is like to settle in a new place. Participants have also described the programs as creating a safe space to reflect on their own assumptions and biases about newcomers, and their questions and participation during sessions suggest active engagement with the material.

The programs have also contributed to learning and capacity-building among organizations and service providers. After public education engagements, some agencies have contacted the NCC for support with making their services more inclusive, such as translating materials into other languages or learning how to be better allies to newcomers. This suggests that the programs can prompt audiences to consider concrete changes in how they communicate with and support newcomers.

There is also evidence of positive outcomes for newcomer participants. Speakers have opportunities to practice English, strengthen their communication, storytelling, and public speaking skills, build confidence in sharing their experiences, build connections, and develop a sense of belonging in the community. These skills can also support newcomers in other areas of their lives; for example, NCC staff noted that participation in these programs has helped some newcomers become more confident in job interview settings.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The NCC uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess its public education programs. Quantitative tracking includes attendance numbers, the number of presentations or engagement opportunities delivered, participation across different settings, and engagement with online materials such as videos and podcasts.

Qualitative feedback is collected through post-engagement surveys, verbal feedback, interactive activities, and follow-up conversations. Post-engagement surveys are typically shared shortly after events and ask participants what they found valuable, what could be improved, and what topics or speakers they would like to see in the future. NCC staff and volunteers also gather verbal feedback from attendees, speakers, teachers, and partners. At some events, the NCC uses interactive tools, such as reflection boards where participants can respond to prompts about what they learned, what surprised them, or what message they would like to share with speakers.

NCC staff review this information to identify trends, gaps, and areas for improvement. The findings are then used to refine the programs. For example, feedback has led the NCC to allow more time for audience questions, recruit speakers from different backgrounds or age groups, select future Community Conversations topics, and adapt sessions so they better fit school curricula and other audience needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

New Canadians Centre

<https://nccpeterborough.ca/>

Living Library

<https://nccpeterborough.ca/get-involved/newcomervoices/livinglibrary/>

Our Neighbourhood

<https://nccpeterborough.ca/get-involved/newcomervoices/ourneighbourhood/>