

Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie Nation Local Immigration Partnership (LIP)

Research Project

Final Report – Phase 2

April 15, 2024



Prepared by the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC)

Contents

List of Tables.....	1
List of Figures	1
Executive Summary	2
Phase 2 Project Methodologies.....	3
Statistical Community Profile	3
Interviews with Key Informants and Service Providers.....	3
Focus Group with Women Newcomers and Immigrants	4
Recruitment Challenges.....	5
Ridge Meadows Community Profile	6
Background on Immigrant and Newcomer Populations	6
Local Context of Ridge Meadows	11
Landscape of Services for Newcomers	12
Adaptation and Evolution of Services	12
Challenges and Barriers in Service Accessibility	13
Gaps in Services for Newcomers	15
Top Priorities for Enhancing Newcomer Services	16
Employment and Education	17
Challenges and Barriers in Employment and Education	17
Social Connections and Community Integration	19
Challenges and Barriers to Social Connection and Community Integration	20
Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness	22
Challenges and Barriers to Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness	23
Collaboration and Partnerships	24
Challenges and Barriers to Collaboration and Partnerships	26
Role of Local and Provincial Government	26
RCMP Engagement and Support	27
Strategic Priorities for Newcomer Integration	28
Priority One: Promote Social Inclusion	28
Priority Two: Support Employment	29
Priority Three: Increase Access to Information and Services	30
Appendix A – Key Informant Interview Guide.....	32
Appendix B – Focus Group Discussion Guide	34

List of Tables

Table 1 - Overview of Key Informants and Service Providers	3
Table 2 - Overview of Focus Group Participants.....	5
Table 3 - Population by immigration status, 2021	6
Table 4 - Recent immigrant population, 2021	7

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Immigrant population growth (2016 vs. 2021)	7
Figure 2 - Recent immigrant population growth (2016 vs. 2021).....	8
Figure 3 - Share of all immigrants and recent immigrants by admission category, 2021	9
Figure 4 - Most common mother tongues, excluding English, with number of speakers.....	10

Executive Summary

The Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie Nation Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) has embarked on a research project to deepen the understanding of the experiences and needs of newcomers in the community. This initiative, supported by Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), is a testament to the recognition of the unique hurdles faced by newcomers and immigrants in Canada. LIPs nationwide aim to unite local service providers, public agencies, community groups, employers, and other stakeholders to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomers, facilitating their settlement and integration into Canadian society.

This research, conducted by the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC), is designed in two phases to inform the LIP's strategic priorities over the coming five years. The project's first phase, running from June 2020 to February 2021, involved creating a statistical profile using 2016 Census data, directly engaging with newcomers through an online survey and focus groups, and interviewing service providers and key community stakeholders. These activities were aimed at identifying the needs and barriers faced by newcomers in accessing settlement services. The second phase, from November 2023 to April 2024, updated the statistical profile with 2021 Census data to capture demographic changes over time, and conducted further focus groups and interviews with key informants and service providers to track trends in service needs and availability.

The findings from both phases reveal significant insights into the socio-demographic characteristics of newcomers, the evolving landscape of services available to them, and the challenges and barriers they continue to encounter. Key themes emerged around employment and education, social connections and community integration, cultural sensitivity and awareness, and the vital role of collaboration and partnerships in enhancing services for newcomers. The research highlights the growing diversity of the newcomer population in Ridge Meadows and points to the pressing need for more comprehensive support in areas such as language instruction, employment, mental health services, and culturally sensitive programming.

This research underscores the efforts and adaptations made by local organizations and service providers in response to the changing needs of the newcomer population. It also emphasizes the ongoing challenges of service accessibility, the critical importance of community-based research in shaping effective support mechanisms, and the collective endeavor of all stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers in Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie communities.

Phase 2 Project Methodologies

By examining statistical data, conducting a focus group, and interviewing key informants and service providers, we aim to capture the multifaceted profile of newcomers, their challenges, and the services available to them.

Statistical Community Profile

The foundation of our analysis is a detailed community profile about immigrants, including recent immigrants, non-permanent residents, and non-immigrants in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. This profile offers statistical insights into the origin, time of arrival, and application types of immigrants, alongside demographic, socio-economic, and labour force data, providing a quantitative baseline for our study. This final report only provides a snapshot of the demographics and socio-economic conditions of the immigrant population in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. The complete ‘Community Profile – Phase 2’ was submitted as a separate report.

Interviews with Key Informants and Service Providers

To better understand the local service landscape for newcomers in the Ridge Meadows area, interviews were conducted with 18 key informants from 14 organizations and service providers, who were identified by the LIP as having experience, knowledge, and organizational perspectives on the needs of newcomers in the community. The final report primarily relies on these interviews, which serve as its main source of data.

Table 1 offers an overview of the key informants and service providers interviewed, detailing the interviewee’s names and positions. They encompass a variety of perspectives from sectors critical to newcomer integration, such as settlement, language, employment, education, law enforcement, and governmental services. While not exhaustive, these interviews provide a broad view of the primary support systems available to newcomers, highlighting both the strengths and areas needing enhancement within the community’s support network. Please see Appendix A for the Key Informant Interview Guide.

Table 1 - Overview of Key Informants and Service Providers

	Full Name	Position	Organization
Participant 1	Bob Meachen	City Councillor	City Council of Pitt Meadows
Participant 2	Petra Frederick	Coordinator of Recreation Access	City of Maple Ridge – Parks and Recreation
Participant 3	Christina Shearme	Coordinator	Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, Katzie Community Network
Participant 4	Jenny Earley	Executive Director	Family Education and Support Center
Participant 5	Natalie Binns	Family Navigator Program and BC SPOKES	Family Education and Support Center
Participant 6	Margarita Abeigon de Lima	Customer Service and Event Specialist	Fraser Valley Regional Library – Maple Ridge

Participant 7	Sarah Jost	Information Services Supervisor	Fraser Valley Regional Library – Maple Ridge
Participant 8	Mary Robson	Executive Director	Friends in Need Food Bank
Participant 9	Nancy Nagy	Client Services Manager	Friends in Need Food Bank
Participant 10	Jean Ireland	LINC Manager & Site Manager	Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC), Maple Ridge
Participant 11	Lisa Beare	BC MLA, Maple Ridge Pitt-Meadows; Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills	Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Participant 12	Julie Klaussner	Media Relations Officer, Community Services & First Outreach	RCMP
Participant 13	Elaine Yamamoto	Literacy Outreach Coordinator	Ridge Meadows Literacy Committee
Participant 14	Maria Perretta	Executive Director	Ridge Meadows Seniors Center
Participant 15	Bev Schmahmann	Outreach Coordinator	Ridge Meadows Seniors Center
Participant 16	Anna Kim	Settlement Worker in School Coordinator (SWIS), School District 42	SUCCESS – SWIS
Participant 17	Karoline DeVries	Manager, Employment Services Center	Work BC
Participant 18	Lynn Easton	Coordinator	Writing Home Women’s Group

Focus Group with Women Newcomers and Immigrants

A focus group comprising women newcomers and immigrants was conducted to gather qualitative data on their experiences moving to Canada. Participants were recruited through an English conversation group facilitated by the Ridge Meadows Literacy Committee. Despite the presence of 12 women at the focus group, 2 were unable to engage in the discussion because of their limited English proficiency.

Table 2 outlines the 10 participants’ place of birth, time of immigration, and time in Canada. Places of birth included India, Iran, China, Israel, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, and Belgium. Time in Canada ranged from 3.5 months to 45. Please see Appendix B for the complete Focus Group Discussion Guide.

Table 2 - Overview of Focus Group Participants

	Place of Birth	Time of Immigration	Time in Canada
Participant 1	India	2023	3.5 months
Participant 2	Iran	2023	4 months
Participant 3	China	2023	1 year
Participant 4	Israel	2022	1.5 years
Participant 5	Iran	2022	2 years
Participant 6	Azerbaijan	2019	5 years
Participant 7	China	2019	5 years
Participant 8	Czech Republic	2019	5 years
Participant 9	Iran	1985	39 years
Participant 10	Belgium	1979	45 years

Recruitment Challenges

Recruitment efforts for further focus group sessions encountered substantial difficulties, underscoring that immigrants, particularly newcomers, represent a hard-to-reach population. The LIP employed various strategies, including leveraging their community networks, launching Facebook campaigns, and establishing a dedicated webpage with a focus group intake form to encourage participation. Nevertheless, these initiatives did not yield any sign-ups, underscoring the intricate nature of engaging with the immigrant community in the Ridge Meadows area and the obstacles inherent in the recruitment phase for research purposes.

Ridge Meadows Community Profile

Background on Immigrant and Newcomer Populations

The Community Profile, reflecting the insights shared by key informants, underscores the evolving demographics of newcomers in the Ridge Meadows area, marking a notable diversification. This shift includes an influx of families and individuals from a variety of backgrounds such as Ukrainian, Spanish-speaking populations from South America, and Filipinos, driven by global migration trends like the conflict in Ukraine and the relative affordability of Ridge Meadows within the Metro Vancouver region.

Highlighting the region's appeal, the Profile details a significant growth in the immigrant population, particularly among recent arrivals who are skilled economic immigrants, showcasing Ridge Meadows as a magnet for diverse skills. Furthermore, it presents a nuanced view of the immigrants' socio-economic integration, indicating improvements in employment rates while simultaneously pointing out persistent income disparities. This complexity offers a deeper understanding of the economic participation and integration challenges faced by immigrants in the region. For a complete review of the demographics and socio-economic conditions within the immigrant communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, see the 'Community Profile – Phase 2 Report'.

As shown in **Table 2**, in Ridge Meadows, nearly one in four residents was an immigrant (25,075 individuals total). An additional 1% in each community were non-permanent residents (935 individuals total)¹. The immigrant population increased by just over 18% in Ridge Meadows since 2016.

Table 3 - Population by immigration status, 2021

	Non-Immigrant		Immigrant		Non-Permanent Resident	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Maple Ridge	68,805	76%	20,230	22%	825	1%
Pitt Meadows	14,075	74%	4,845	25%	110	1%
Total	82,880	75%	25,075	23%	935	1%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Target group profile of the population by immigration and citizenship status, Census, 2021. Downloaded from Community Data Program.

As shown in **Table 4**, in 2021, there were a total of 2,590 recent immigrants in Maple Ridge (2,160) and Pitt Meadows (430). Recent immigrants made up 10% of the overall immigrant population and 2% of the total population. The share of recent immigrants within the immigrant population and within the total population did not change since 2016.

¹ By comparison, for the entire Regional District of Greater Vancouver in 2021, only 53% of residents were non-immigrants, while 42% were immigrants and 5% were non-permanent residents.

Table 4 - Recent immigrant population, 2021

	Recent Immigrants (2016-2021)	Share of all immigrants	Share of total population
Maple Ridge	2,160	11%	2%
Pitt Meadows	430	9%	2%
Total	2,590	10%	2%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Target group profile of the population by immigration and citizenship status, Census, 2021. Downloaded from Community Data Program.

Figure 1 shows the growth in total number of immigrants in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows from 2016 to 2021, highlighting the increase diversity in the region. In Maple Ridge, the immigrant population increased from 15,460 to 20,230, while in Pitt Meadows the immigrant population increased from 3,955 to 4,845 individuals.

Figure 1 - Immigrant population growth (2016 vs. 2021)

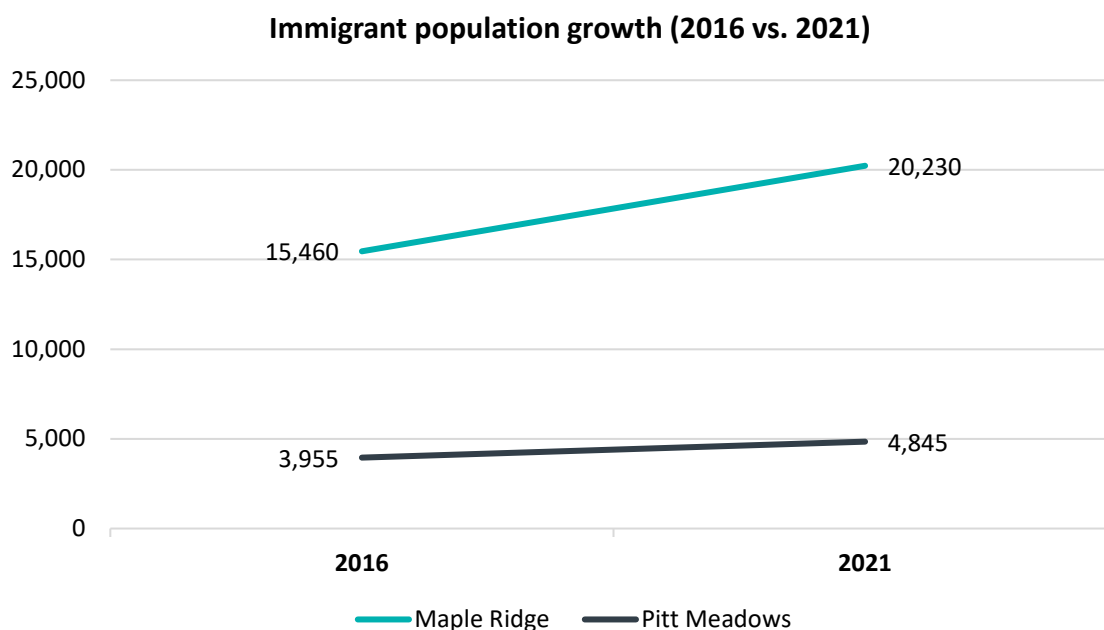


Figure 2 shows the growth in the number of recent immigrants in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows from 2016 to 2021. In Maple Ridge, there were 1,520 immigrants who obtained status between 2011 and 2016 compared to 2,160 immigrants who obtained status between 2016 and 2021. In Pitt Meadows, there were 385 immigrants who obtained status between 2011 and 2016 compared to 430 immigrants who obtained status between 2016 and 2021.

Figure 2 - Recent immigrant population growth (2016 vs. 2021)

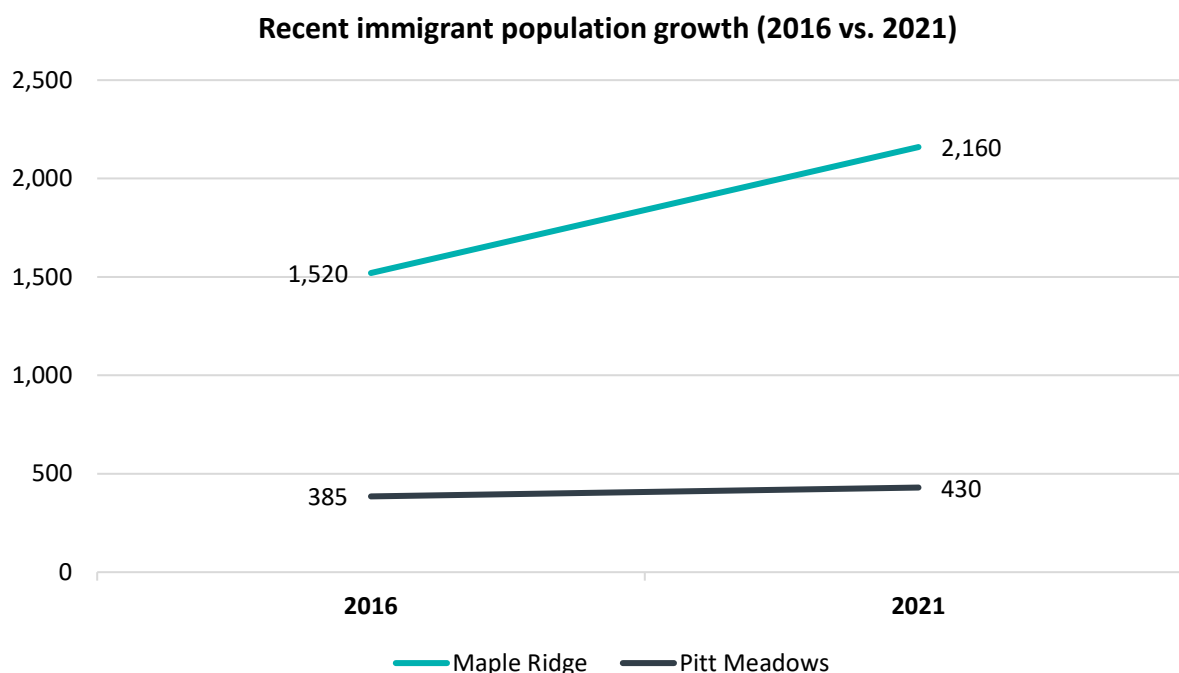
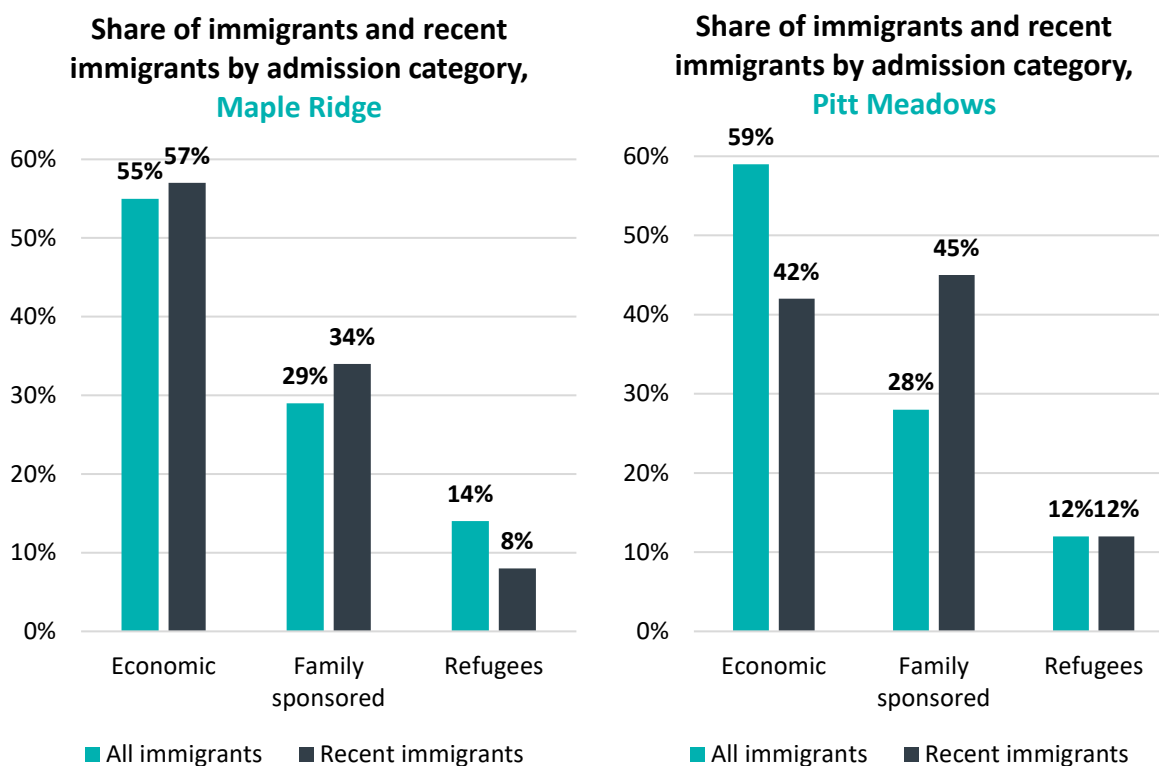


Figure 3 shows the share of immigrants and recent immigrants by admission category in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. In comparison to all immigrants, a slightly lower share of recent immigrants in Ridge Meadows were economic immigrants (54%), while a higher share were family sponsored immigrants (36%), and a significantly lower share were refugees (9%). Since 2016, there has been a decrease in economic immigrants (from 63%) and an increase in family sponsored immigrants (from 32%) and refugees (from 5%). Compared with the provincial rate, a lower share of recent immigrants were economic immigrants, and a higher share were family sponsored, while the share of refugees was consistent.

The most common admission category and applicant type for men and women in both communities was economic secondary applicant (i.e. the spouse or dependent of an immigrant admitted in the economic category). Although, in Maple Ridge, just as many men were primary applicant as secondary applicant. Women make a significantly larger share of the secondary applicant category than men and are also more likely to be family-sponsored immigrants than men, while men outnumber women in the economic primary applicant and refugee categories.

Figure 3 - Share of all immigrants and recent immigrants by admission category, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Target group profile of the population by immigration and citizenship status, Census, 2021. Downloaded from Community Data Program.

The most common places of birth for all immigrants in both Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows were the United Kingdom, the Philippines, India, and China. In Maple Ridge, there was a larger share of immigrants who were born in the United Kingdom.

In Maple Ridge, the most common places of birth for recent immigrants were the Philippines (16% of all recent immigrants), followed by India (14%), China (8%), and the United States (7%). In 2021, in Pitt Meadows, the most common places of birth for recent immigrants were the Philippines (17% of all recent immigrants), followed by India (13%), China (9%), United States (7%), South Korea (7%), and Syria (7%).

In 2021, there were 1,370 individuals in Ridge Meadows who did not know English (defined as being able to conduct a conversation solely in English). This includes 1,135 individuals in Maple Ridge and 235 individuals in Pitt Meadows. Since 2016, the number of individuals who did not know English increased by 38%, which represents three times the population growth of Ridge Meadows.

Figure 4 shows the nine most common mother tongues of residents in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows in 2021, excluding English. Note all residents of the Katzie 1 reserve speak English as

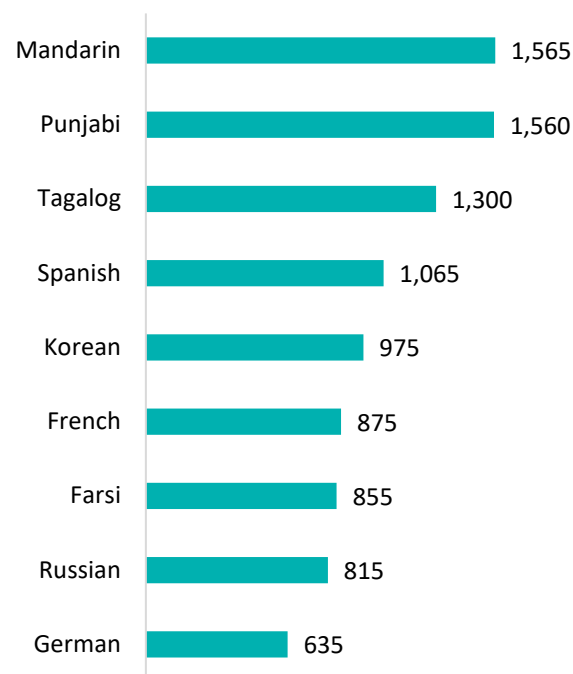
their mother tongue². ‘Mother tongue’ here refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data was collected.

Figure 4 - Most common mother tongues, excluding English, with number of speakers

Most common mother tongues

Maple Ridge

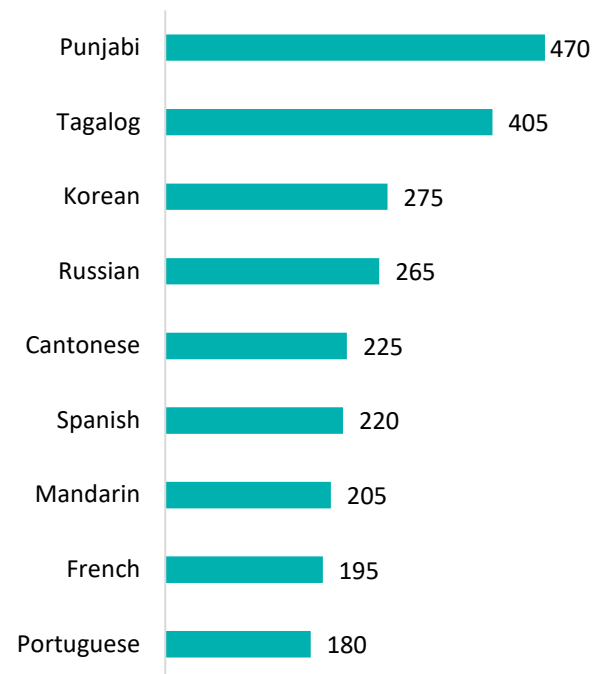
Excluding English



Most common mother tongues

Pitt Meadows

Excluding English



In 2021, 21% of residents in Maple Ridge were visible minorities (19,425 individuals), as were 24% of all residents in Pitt Meadows (4,580 individuals)³. Comparatively, in 2016, 15% of residents in Maple Ridge were visible minorities (12,115 individuals) as were 19% of all residents in Pitt Meadows (3,485 individuals). Of all visible minorities in Maple Ridge in 2021, 60% (11,690) were immigrants, including 8% (1,590) who were recent immigrants. Of all visible minorities in Pitt Meadows in 2021, 62% (2,840) were immigrants, including 7% (320) who were recent immigrants.

² There is no current data on mother tongues of residents for Katzie 2 reserve.

³ By contrast, across Greater Vancouver, just over half (54%) of residents were visible minorities in 2021.

Local Context of Ridge Meadows

In Ridge Meadows, the integration and support of newcomers are profoundly influenced by the local context, with various initiatives playing a pivotal role in enhancing the community's capacity to welcome new residents. Key organizations such as the LIP, Work BC, the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC), and the Settlement Worker in School Coordinator (SWIS) Program are instrumental in bridging the gap between newcomers and vital services, including employment assistance and social programs. These initiatives not only raise community awareness but also actively work towards creating a supportive environment for newcomers. Despite these efforts, newcomers encounter obstacles, rooted primarily in the community's relatively smaller size, which can lead to limited service accessibility and transportation difficulties. For example, there is only one site that provides the Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC) program. These challenges can hinder newcomers' ability to access necessary services or attend language classes, crucial for their integration and settlement process.

On the other hand, the allure of Ridge Meadows, particularly Maple Ridge, for newcomers is undeniably tied to its greater housing affordability and the appealing suburban atmosphere it offers. This aspect of the area serves as a significant draw, though it is juxtaposed with the reality of scarce local employment opportunities, which poses a notable barrier to the integration of newcomers into the community. Adding to the area's appeal, Maple Ridge has witnessed an influx of shops that cater to diverse cultural preferences, including a European store, a Filipino supermarket, and a newly opened Middle Eastern deli and bakery. These establishments not only provide newcomers with a taste of home but also enrich the local food landscape for all residents. Furthermore, cultural events put on by the library and community programs, such as those offered by the Family Education and Support Centre, play a crucial role in promoting integration. These initiatives, while effective in fostering a sense of belonging and community spirit, often encounter persistent language barriers that can isolate newcomers. Despite these challenges, ongoing efforts to celebrate cultural diversity and connect residents highlight a committed endeavour to create an inclusive atmosphere in Ridge Meadows, demonstrating the community's strong spirit and dedication to embracing diversity.

Social and Economic Conditions

Key informants in Ridge Meadows have shed light on the multitude of challenges and changes newcomers face, driven largely by shifting social and economic landscapes. Among the critical issues highlighted is the surging cost of living that affects all residents, but particularly hits newcomers hard due to their often limited income streams. This economic strain is further compounded by the issue of housing affordability, a hurdle not only for immigrants but also for other vulnerable groups within the community, such as seniors and individuals grappling with mental health challenges. The scarcity and high cost of rental options stand out as formidable barriers, underscoring the need for more accessible housing solutions to support the diverse needs of the Ridge Meadows population.

In addressing these complexities, targeted initiatives and collaborations have emerged as vital lifelines for newcomers navigating their new environment. Notably, the formation of the Ridge Meadows Ukrainian Welcoming Committee and strategic city partnerships with entities like the LIP exemplify the community's proactive approach. These initiatives, focusing on essential supports

such as housing, food security, and educational resources, aim to alleviate some of the pressures faced by newcomers. Despite these commendable efforts, the relentless demand for affordable housing and the broader economic challenges of living in Ridge Meadows loom large, highlighting the ongoing struggle to meet the needs of a growing and diverse newcomer population against a backdrop of escalating living costs.

Landscape of Services for Newcomers

The service landscape for newcomers in Ridge Meadows has seen growth, adapting to evolving demographic and newcomers' needs in areas like employment, language education, and social integration. Despite expansions, challenges persist in fully addressing the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of the immigrant population. Key services in demand include language support—particularly English conversation groups, educational programs, and community integration efforts, with emphasis on employment support services, legal aid, and recreational activities. Since 2021, while the range of services has broadened, keeping pace with the increasing and diverse needs of the newcomer population remains a significant challenge, highlighting the need for enhanced service capacity and development.

Adaptation and Evolution of Services

The evolution of services provided to newcomers since 2021 reflects a significant adaptation to the growing diversity within communities. Organizations have broadened their language offerings to include services in additional languages, such as Farsi, catering specifically to the Afghan and Iranian communities. The adoption of digital tools like Google Translate and the creation of online platforms have facilitated education and social connection, illustrating a shift towards embracing technology to meet the needs of a diverse population. Furthermore, programs have been tailored for cultural sensitivity, including parenting workshops conducted in Farsi and the establishment of multicultural women's groups, indicating a thoughtful approach to inclusivity.

Efforts to integrate cultural and linguistic diversity into services are evident in actions such as translating documents and offering library introductions in multiple languages. This showcases the commitment of service providers to make their offerings more accessible and welcoming to newcomers. The implementation of translation services and the introduction of programming in languages like Farsi underscore the responsive nature of these organizations to the specific needs of newcomers from various backgrounds, including those from Ukraine and Afghanistan. Through targeted support such as food assistance and childcare solutions, these organizations acknowledge the crucial role of community integration in facilitating a smoother transition for immigrants and refugees.

The integration of volunteers with language skills in orientation and registration processes represents a practical approach to assisting newcomers. This, along with adapting services to meet the cultural preferences of different ethnic groups—for instance, prioritizing fresh produce over canned food for certain communities—highlights the efforts made to respect and accommodate diverse cultural needs.

Friends in Need Food Bank's reflection on the expansion of language diversity among their clients, from "seven or eight languages" to "15 different languages," underscores the changing demographics and the organization's adaptability. The adaptations to cater to cultural dietary restrictions and the recognition of service gaps, such as the need for gender-specific programming, indicate a responsive and evolving service landscape aimed at catering to the diverse backgrounds and requirements of newcomers.

“A year ago, we had maybe a variety of seven or eight languages, and now we've got 15 different languages among our clients. 80% of our clients are English speaking but 20% are other ethnic groups.”

Despite innovative efforts to assist newcomers in navigating the service landscape, including the creation of the Multicultural Hub at the library, which consolidates various organizations within a single space to offer information, the growing demand from an increasingly diverse newcomer population persistently exceeds the pace of service expansion. This highlights the pressing need for additional resources and staffing. The shift towards hybrid class schedules for language learning exemplifies attempts to address barriers like childcare and transportation, yet it also underscores the ongoing challenges in meeting the demand for services. Engaging community feedback directly from newcomers is emphasized as crucial for tailoring services effectively, showcasing a forward-thinking approach to service provision that prioritizes the voices and needs of those it aims to serve.

Challenges and Barriers in Service Accessibility

Service providers face several challenges in effectively meeting the needs of newcomers due to a combination of factors including staffing, budgetary constraints, and logistical issues. A notable challenge is the absence of specific training programs for staff or volunteers, which is crucial for enhancing their effectiveness with newcomers. Budget limitations further hinder the ability to offer professional development opportunities, essential for equipping staff with the necessary skills to serve the newcomer population better.

Efforts to adapt services for newcomers through digital tools and community collaboration highlight the ongoing commitment to enhancing accessibility. However, challenges persist in ensuring staff proficiency in the diverse languages of the newcomer populations and in addressing logistical and structural barriers to expanding these services. Furthermore, a unique challenge arises from the fact that many newcomers, while fluent in their native spoken languages, may lack the ability to read in those same languages. This literacy gap complicates the use of translated materials or Google Translate as tools for service provision, revealing a deeper layer of complexity in meeting the varied needs of newcomers and emphasizing the need for tailored solutions in communication and service delivery.

One challenge that we actually have with many of the people attending our programs is that when stuff is translated, when it's written, quite a few of the clients that are coming here don't actually read their native language... so that has been a challenge for us, for using those types of tools.

A newcomer in the focus group vividly highlights a specific hurdle they encountered: the inability to take a driving test in their native language, which poses a significant challenge due to limited English proficiency. This instance is indicative of a larger issue where the provision of services in the diverse languages of newcomers remains a challenge, reflecting a gap in the inclusivity and accessibility of critical services in Canada. Despite the potential ease of translating materials in the digital era, essential services like driving exams lack sufficient language support options, representing a systemic barrier to newcomers' independence and integration. Such limitations on accessibility underscore the necessity for service provision systems to adapt and become more inclusive, acknowledging the linguistic diversity among Canada's immigrant population to ensure equitable access to all essential services and facilitate a smoother assimilation into Canadian society.

The complexity of tailoring services to the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of different communities is further highlighted by the need to accommodate individuals with visitor visas or those under specific programs like the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET). These groups often face eligibility issues for certain settlement programs, underscoring a gap in support rather than service. For example, Ukrainians under work permits through the CUAET program, despite being accepted as refugees, are ineligible for certain job training programs available only to permanent residents.

An increasing expectation among newcomers for immediate access to training and services sometimes leads to complaints, reflecting a potential mismatch between the understanding of available resources and the actual needs. Challenges such as long waitlists for English language classes, the demand for culturally appropriate food, and barriers related to digital literacy and transportation are pressing concerns that underline the need for more inclusive and accessible services.

Despite efforts to address these issues, challenges like transportation accessibility, language barriers, and the overall capacity to meet the demand for services like LINC and ESL classes persist. The geographical spread of the community and the urban sprawl of Ridge Meadows exacerbate these issues, indicating a pressing need for comprehensive solutions to effectively tackle both new and existing barriers to service access.

Work BC and ISS of BC have noted specific challenges related to language education, including massive waitlists for English classes and the nuanced difficulties of online LINC classes, which may not be suitable for all learners. The lack of childcare services further prevents parents from participating in language learning or employment opportunities, highlighting the need for integrated support services that consider the logistical realities of newcomers' lives.

To improve accessibility and inclusion, service providers emphasize the importance of transportation improvements, enhancing digital literacy, and providing robust translation services. These measures are crucial for ensuring that newcomers can effectively communicate and access the resources necessary for their integration and well-being in the community.

Gaps in Services for Newcomers

Key informants addressed critical gaps in support and services for newcomers, highlighting specific areas where improvements are essential to facilitate better integration and access to necessary resources.

A significant concern highlighted is the acute shortage of mental health services available for newcomers, who not only grapple with isolation and culture shock but may also carry the heavy burden of trauma from their experiences in their home countries or during their journey to Canada. This need is particularly pronounced among those who do not speak English, underscoring the critical requirement for mental health support that is accessible, culturally sensitive, and linguistically inclusive. A SWIS worker specifically pointed out the urgent need for mental health support among teens and their families arriving from Ukraine, a population deeply affected by the ongoing conflict with Russia and in dire need of specialized care to address their trauma. The lack of such support makes the emotional and psychological adjustment to a new environment exponentially more challenging, intensifying feelings of isolation. This scarcity highlights the paramount importance of prioritizing comprehensive emotional and psychological care for newcomers, acknowledging the profound challenges they face in adapting to life in a new country while coping with the aftereffects of trauma.

Furthermore, there is a notable gap in services tailored to various demographic groups among newcomers, such as youth, children, and seniors. This lack of specialized programs hinders these groups' ability to integrate fully into the community and access educational and employment opportunities. The absence of youth and child programs, especially during critical periods such as spring break and summer closures, has been identified as a significant shortfall. Additionally, the need for programs catering to the interests and needs of seniors, who may feel particularly isolated due to language barriers and a lack of age-appropriate activities, highlights the broader issue of insufficient resources to support the diverse needs of newcomers across different age groups.

Navigating complex systems, such as rental agreements and banking, presents additional challenges for newcomers lacking adequate language proficiency. Key informants suggested increasing the role of navigators who can liaise between different organizations and assist newcomers in overcoming these barriers. These navigators would play a crucial role in connecting individuals with the various services they need, helping to fill out forms, and ensuring that the necessary paperwork is completed correctly, thereby easing the integration process.

In summary, addressing these gaps in mental health services, providing tailored programs for different demographic groups, and improving navigation support are crucial steps towards building a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers. These measures would significantly contribute to their ability to integrate successfully and access the resources they need to thrive in their new community.

Top Priorities for Enhancing Newcomer Services

As part of the key informant interviews, service providers and key informants were queried about the foremost priorities for improving services offered to newcomers in Ridge Meadows, with the aim of addressing the varied needs of this group through community feedback. Among the top priorities are the expansion of language learning classes to facilitate better communication and integration, and the provision of more culturally relevant social opportunities that allow newcomers to connect with their heritage and with each other. Ensuring food security, with an emphasis on access to culturally significant foods, is essential for maintaining the well-being and comfort of newcomers, reflecting their diverse culinary traditions. Additionally, there's a pressing need for improving diversity and anti-racism training among service providers to foster a more inclusive and understanding community environment. Expanding accessible and affordable childcare options is also crucial, enabling parents to pursue employment or education opportunities without the burden of childcare concerns.

Key informants in the community have further highlighted the importance of tailoring services to the professional qualifications of newcomers, ensuring that they can leverage their expertise and contribute meaningfully to their fields in the Canadian context. This includes the provision of supportive employment programs and workshops focused on professional credential recognition and employment integration. The significance of offering informational programs within the community is also emphasized, aiming to bridge the gap between newcomers and the services available to them. Enhanced support in mental health, housing assistance, and online educational opportunities cater to those who face barriers to attending in-person sessions, addressing issues like childcare responsibilities or conflicting work schedules. Improving transportation and housing options is recognized as essential for facilitating easier access to services and better living conditions for newcomers.

To meet these ambitious goals, organizations serving newcomers in Ridge Meadows express a clear need for increased funding and staffing levels, in line with the growing population of newcomers. Collaborative information sharing among service providers is deemed necessary for delivering comprehensive support, ensuring that services are universally accessible. Training for service providers in diversity, anti-oppression, and trauma-informed practices is identified as a cornerstone for creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all newcomers. Furthermore, encouraging the participation of newcomers in the community through feedback mechanisms and volunteer opportunities is vital for fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. Finally, boosting digital skills among staff and ensuring that tools like translation services are readily available are key steps toward improving service provision and accessibility for newcomers in Ridge Meadows.

Employment and Education

The integration of newcomers into Canadian society places a significant emphasis on employment and education as pivotal elements for their successful adaptation. Concerns about finding employment and the validity of educational qualifications in Canada were recurrent themes discussed by newcomers in the focus group. Newcomers express worries about job security and the recognition of their skills and training.

Organizations are actively working to provide essential job search tools, career planning, and educational training, recognizing these as critical components of the integration process. Enhanced support in crafting resumes, honing interview skills, and offering courses tailored to help professionals gain recognition in British Columbia's job market are among the focused efforts. Additionally, there's a growing demand for language instruction, particularly through LINC classes, aimed at elevating newcomers to work proficiency in English. These concerted efforts form part of a comprehensive strategy designed to seamlessly integrate immigrants and refugees into the local workforce and educational systems, thereby overcoming immediate language hurdles and fostering long-term career progression.

Programs provided by Work BC and ISS of BC (Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia) have been recognized for their effectiveness in supporting newcomers with their job searches. Activities such as job fairs hosted by these organizations have proven instrumental in connecting newcomers with employment opportunities, offering them valuable resources, and direct support to navigate the job market in their new environment. These initiatives have not only facilitated professional connections but have also played a crucial role in helping newcomers adapt to and integrate into the local community and workforce.

There have been notable successes in the realm of employment and education for newcomers. The reinstatement of free adult basic education marks a significant milestone in aiding English language skill development, an essential step towards workforce integration. Efforts to engage newcomers in community and volunteer opportunities have also led to employment, underscoring the value of active community participation in the integration journey. A highlighted success story involves an immigrant from the Philippines who received funding for a one-year program to obtain a nursing license in BC, exemplifying the targeted support provided for professional integration and the positive outcomes of such initiatives.

However, key informants have identified a pressing need for additional funding to broaden initiatives like those offered by Douglas College. These workshops are designed to assist newcomers in navigating the professional landscape in Canada, helping them to work in their chosen fields. Despite their potential, these programs are currently hampered by capacity and funding limitations, indicating a gap that needs to be addressed to fully support newcomers in achieving their professional and educational goals in Canada.

Challenges and Barriers in Employment and Education

In Ridge Meadows, organizations are tackling the intertwined challenges of employment and education faced by newcomers, which are primarily focused on overcoming language barriers and the recognition of professional qualifications within British Columbia. Initiatives are in place to provide wide-ranging support, encompassing career planning, job search assistance, and

educational training specifically designed to aid in the acknowledgment of foreign credentials. However, these efforts are somewhat hindered by a notable deficiency in digital literacy among newcomers, restricting their ability to access online classes and employment services efficiently.

The pathway to employment and further education for newcomers is complicated by substantial wait times for LINC classes, sometimes extending to nearly a year. The shift towards more precarious employment forms, such as part-time or contract jobs, introduces additional hurdles, particularly for those who cannot participate in daytime LINC classes due to their work schedules. To address these issues, ISS of BC has introduced evening and online courses and facilitated cross-referrals among services, aiming to accommodate the high demand and varied needs of newcomers. Yet, these solutions also encounter specific challenges, including the integration of digital tools and the provision of accessible learning environments.

"I recently moved here and I'm really worried about not getting a job. Language is the main problem for me because in India, my first language was not English so here this is the main problem... But I don't lose hope and I'm trying to learn English and I'm hoping I will get a job within a year."

The transition from income assistance to meaningful employment represents a significant challenge for newcomers, especially for those with limited English proficiency, which is often a prerequisite for employment. This language barrier not only raises safety concerns among potential employers but also hinders effective job placement, perpetuating reliance on income assistance. Expanding LINC classes is critical for enabling newcomers to acquire necessary language skills, thereby facilitating their integration into the workforce.

Furthermore, there is a recognized need for more robust support mechanisms to facilitate the recognition and utilization of diverse professional skills among newcomers. A participant from Israel expressed their struggle in leveraging their background as a parenthood coach in Canada, a role distinctly recognized in their homeland. They pointed out that in Canada, such duties are typically within the realm of psychologists, making it challenging for them to continue their profession due to the different occupational standards and recognition. This highlights the broader issue many newcomers face in translating their skills and education to fit the Canadian job market and regulatory environment. Professionals in fields such as healthcare and accounting face unique challenges in adapting their foreign qualifications to Canadian standards.

Key informants have pointed out the obstacles related to credential recognition and the importance of specialized workshops and programs to bridge these gaps. Enhancing educational offerings with flexible scheduling and online options is crucial for aiding newcomer integration, providing them with essential skills and qualifications for the local job market. Work BC offers financial support for retraining, considering each individual's financial need, which includes family income and living expenses in BC. Despite support for retraining and certification from entities like Work BC, newcomers often find themselves in survival jobs due to regulatory and language barriers, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to support professional integration.

Support in employment and education is crucial for the successful integration of newcomers, highlighted by the acute demand for English language classes at all levels and the need for additional support services such as computer access and childminding. These educational and logistical supports are pivotal in assisting newcomers in navigating their new community and finding employment.

Social Connections and Community Integration

The significance of social events, support groups, and community spaces in assisting newcomers with building connections and fostering a sense of belonging within their new community was a recurring theme in the discussions. Programs that cater specifically to women, youth, and families were highlighted as especially beneficial, underscoring the critical role these initiatives play in social and cultural integration. Organizations pointed out the essential nature of social connections and community integration for newcomers, focusing on activities that facilitate these connections, such as multicultural events, conversation and writing groups, and family drop-in programs. The creation of welcoming spaces where newcomers can forge relationships and learn about community resources was emphasized as fundamental to helping them feel part of the community and establish a sense of belonging.

“I have realized that this writing workshop has definitely brought me more than expected. Not only writing skills, but also communication, relief of pressure, friendships, and more.”

Participant in the Writing Home Women’s Group

Success stories cited by the key informants include the establishment of welcoming spaces that encourage newcomers to connect with others, participate in community programs, and form friendships. The inclusion of newcomers in multicultural events and programs, such as Multicultural Day and Canada Day celebrations, has proven instrumental in attracting large crowds, fostering a sense of community, and providing opportunities for cultural engagement and learning. The Multicultural Hub was specifically mentioned as a pivotal space for service providers to interact directly with newcomers, easing access to information and services and thus enhancing social integration within the community.

The importance of a comprehensive approach to integration and support was underlined, including police engagement in community events for trust-building and the necessity of connecting with communities directly through their cultural groups. The effectiveness of the SWIS workers in schools as an initial point of contact for families was also mentioned, emphasizing its role in providing social support.

The desire for increased social activities, like multicultural festivals, was expressed as crucial for strengthening community bonds, alleviating isolation, and enhancing newcomers’ sense of belonging. Innovative community initiatives, such as dinners for migrant workers, were highlighted

as effective strategies for fostering social integration. The development of open community spaces for newcomers to host and participate in their cultural or social events was highlighted, enhancing their ability to engage with and contribute to the community. Community initiatives, including providing bicycles and jackets to migrant workers and hosting dinners at the Youth Centre, exemplify efforts to reduce isolation and loneliness among newcomers, showcasing the community's commitment to welcoming and integrating them.

The importance of social activities in fostering community connections was emphasized by newcomers in the focus group, with dance groups at the mall being highlighted as a key example. These activities provide essential opportunities for newcomers to build relationships within their new communities. Nonetheless, the formidable barrier posed by the English language complicates everyday interactions and the comprehension of cultural nuances, making integration into Canadian society more challenging. Efforts to mitigate these challenges have seen newcomers engaging more actively in community groups and seeking language assistance. Newcomers noted that their participation in the English Conversational Group, as well as the Writing Home Women's Group, plays a significant role in helping them make friends and feel less isolated, highlighting the value of such community initiatives in fostering a sense of belonging. These steps underscore the critical need for supportive environments that not only encourage language practice but also help newcomers navigate the cultural differences they encounter, facilitating a smoother integration process.

“My main fear was how I would meet friends or make connections because in my country I had a lot of connections with many women... I'm going to dance every morning in the mall. There is a group of women that come and dance. So that is the main way I meet new people, Canadian and not Canadian. And then we start going to coffee together, went to restaurants together and we celebrate the birthday and things like that. So this is the way I solved my problem of meeting new people and so it's a very good experience, very good experience for me.”

Senior newcomers were identified as a particularly isolated group, with a highlighted need for enhanced support to facilitate their community integration. The Senior's Centre was mentioned as offering a unique opportunity for community groups, which traditionally meet in private settings such as homes, to use its facilities. This shift not only provides a more inclusive venue for cultural and group activities but also serves as a gateway for senior newcomers to familiarize themselves with the Centre's broader offerings, aiding in their gradual integration into the community.

Challenges and Barriers to Social Connection and Community Integration

The process of social connection and community integration for newcomers in Ridge Meadows faces several challenges and barriers, notably language barriers and translation issues. These limitations restrict newcomers' access to various programs and services, complicating their integration journey. Additionally, confusion regarding immigration statuses has a direct impact on

eligibility for certain services, further complicating access. A significant challenge identified is the strain on service providers caused by an influx of newcomers, which results in delays in service access. Despite these hurdles, community support mechanisms, such as volunteer translation services and social media groups, have played a crucial role in helping newcomers build relationships and integrate more seamlessly into the community.

Persistent issues such as language barriers and cultural differences are seen as significant obstacles to newcomers' social integration. Addressing these challenges through inclusive social programs and events is suggested as a way to markedly improve newcomers' integration experiences. The importance of these social interactions is underscored by the challenge newcomers face in making social connections and integrating due to language barriers and feelings of isolation. Key informants highlighted the clear need for more social events and programs designed to enhance community engagement among newcomers. It also points out the absence of childminding services as a significant barrier to participation in language learning and community programs, emphasizing the importance of creating spaces for newcomers to connect, share experiences, and support one another.

The lack of a cultural centre, mosque, temple, or similar communal venues stresses the challenge for newcomers to find dedicated spaces for gathering and participating in cultural exchanges and celebrations. These spaces often serve as vital hubs for community connection, offering newcomers and residents alike a place to meet, share experiences, and support each other in a culturally familiar setting. This gap not only hampers the integration process but also reflects the broader issue of service accessibility and the need for more inclusive community planning.

But there's really no place for people to gather, there's not like a cultural centre or something. We don't have a mosque. We don't have a temple. So a lot of those places that people would go to connect with community just aren't there. We don't have them here.

In the focus group discussion, newcomers shared their concerns about the cleanliness of the bus station in Maple Ridge, particularly at Haney Place, with one participant explicitly mentioning, "Canada is very good but the bus station in Maple Ridge at Haney Place is very dirty, always garbage everywhere, and homelessness, and that gives me stress. I don't feel comfortable at the bus station." This statement underlines a broader issue affecting newcomers' transportation experiences and their feelings of safety and comfort in their new environment. The condition of the bus station not only impacts their daily commute but also influences their overall perception of public spaces and community standards in Ridge Meadows. The mention of garbage and homelessness at the bus station highlights the need for improved cleanliness and maintenance, which are crucial for fostering a welcoming and secure atmosphere for all community members, including newcomers trying to navigate their new surroundings.

Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

The discourse on enhancing services for newcomers in Ridge Meadows has underscored the critical need for cultural sensitivity and awareness within organizations dedicated to serving this demographic. Organizations have highlighted the importance of adapting their services to reflect cultural sensitivity and awareness. This includes organizing multicultural events, employing staff proficient in the languages of primary newcomer groups, and ensuring that program materials and communications are available in multiple languages. Such measures illustrate a proactive approach to inclusivity, aiming to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps and foster a deeper understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds.

There is an increased recognition of the community's cultural and linguistic diversity, with efforts extending to offer programs in languages such as Farsi and addressing the specific challenges encountered by newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The need to be mindful of cultural differences, such as dietary restrictions, and to accommodate these preferences in service provision has been highlighted. Community gatherings, including dinners and multicultural events like Multicultural Day and Diwali celebration, which have attracted upwards to 500 community members, underscore the growing appreciation and celebration of diverse cultures within Ridge Meadows. These community events are also praised for their role in promoting cultural sensitivity and helping newcomers integrate with the broader community, thereby creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for all community members.

In Ridge Meadows, the emphasis on cultural sensitivity and awareness within organizations serving newcomers has led to the adoption of various training programs focused on allyship, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and anti-racism. These initiatives are designed to create a more inclusive environment, equipping personnel with the knowledge to better understand and meet the needs and experiences of newcomers. While some organizations have specifically implemented training for staff and volunteers to enhance their interactions with newcomers, there has been a broader approach to educating the community at large on these vital issues.

Notably, many of these training programs, particularly on EDI and anti-racism, have been conducted for the broader community, not just for staff or volunteers of individual organizations. For instance, BC SPOKES, a program under the Family Education and Support Center, has facilitated this type of training, encouraging organizations to have their staff participate. The BC SPOKES Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Anti-Racism Community Group, part of the province-wide anti-racism network called Resilience BC, exemplifies the community-wide effort to combat racism.

The introduction of allyship, EDI, and anti-racism training programs underscores a commitment to enhancing cultural understanding, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring a welcoming service environment for all. These efforts are crucial for educating both service providers and the wider community on responding to racism and appreciating the growing cultural dynamics within Ridge Meadows. Despite these positive steps, there is an acknowledgment of gaps in training specifically tailored to the needs of newcomers, indicating room for further improvement.

Calls for more comprehensive diversity, anti-oppression, and trauma-informed practice training reflect the acknowledgment of the complex backgrounds and experiences that newcomers bring with them. Such training is essential for ensuring respectful and equitable treatment of all

individuals, particularly those who may have experienced intense situations in their countries of origin. Key informants have stressed the importance of extending anti-racism training to both the community and service providers, highlighting the need for respectful and effective communication with newcomers. This approach not only fosters a more inclusive and welcoming environment but also actively promotes cultural sensitivity and awareness across Ridge Meadows, contributing to the overall effort of integrating newcomers into the community.

Challenges and Barriers to Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

The focus group discussion with immigrants revealed poignant insights into the challenges of cultural sensitivity and awareness that newcomers encounter upon their arrival in Canada. Participants articulated difficulties such as grappling with the subtleties of communication that go beyond mere language barriers, including the implicit cultural nuances and unspoken norms that vary significantly from one culture to another. This challenge is further compounded by the need to navigate new cultural landscapes and dispel pre-existing biases, a sentiment shared by a newcomer, who had to learn to understand and appreciate people from backgrounds historically viewed negatively in their home country. Additionally, the discussion brought to light the issue of cultural acceptance, particularly around language accents, with an immigrant revealing a perceived lack of acceptance for non-native English accents, even within their family. These shared experiences underscore the critical need for enhanced cultural sensitivity and awareness in communities, advocating for a welcoming environment that not only recognizes but also celebrates the rich tapestry of languages and cultures that newcomers bring to Canada.

The challenge, the big challenge is the English language. It's very difficult and I need help with that, ... the other challenge is to understand the subtext of what people say. Cultural things. What you say, what you don't say? OK, that's different. It's very different in any culture.

The readiness to serve individuals facing language barriers and varying levels of English proficiency was emphasized by key informants. Agencies are encouraged to become more adaptable and informed to effectively support the wide range of new diversities within the newcomer population. This adaptability is crucial in addressing the unique cultural needs within the community.

The diversity of the newcomer population poses particular challenges in meeting their specific cultural needs. Organizations have emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in service provision, noting difficulties in accommodating cultural preferences within communal settings. For example, ensuring that food provided through the food bank meets various cultural dietary restrictions has been highlighted as a complex issue that requires careful consideration and sensitivity.

Organizations serving newcomers in Ridge Meadows recognized other several gaps and challenges that hinder the effective delivery of services to this diverse population. One key area of concern is the lack of tailored training for staff and volunteers on newcomer-specific issues. Budget constraints for professional development, the dynamic nature of community services, and the

necessity for training that addresses the unique needs of diverse newcomer populations are significant barriers. These challenges underscore the critical need for targeted training initiatives designed to enhance service accessibility and inclusivity for newcomers.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for more trauma-informed approaches in assisting newcomers. Many newcomers arrive with unique challenges stemming from past experiences of war, displacement, or other traumatic events. Adopting trauma-informed approaches necessitates a deep understanding and sensitivity to the impact of trauma on individuals. Service providers must ensure that their services are delivered in a manner that is respectful and supportive of trauma survivors' needs, which may involve adjusting communication methods, creating a safe and welcoming environment, and being cautious of potential triggers that could re-traumatize those seeking assistance.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The collaboration between various organizations, agencies, and service providers is recognized as paramount in effectively supporting newcomers in Ridge Meadows. Key informants emphasize the benefits of joint efforts to bridge service gaps and collaborate on delivering comprehensive services. Through the key informant interviews, the vital role of collaboration and partnerships in servicing newcomers has been brought to the fore, with a specific emphasis on working alongside organizations like the LIP and utilizing community networking strategies to enhance service delivery. These partnerships, crucial for referrals and service integration, signify a concerted community-wide endeavor to support newcomers through coordinated actions.

The LIP is spotlighted as a central figure in spreading knowledge and aligning efforts among different service agencies to aptly meet the varied needs of newcomers. LIP enhances community collaboration by organizing monthly meetings for service providers to exchange information and synchronize efforts. Nevertheless, there's a call for augmenting LIP's staffing to keep service provider information promptly updated, reflecting the dynamic nature of community services.

Engagement with the LIP and other community stakeholders to celebrate multiculturalism and diversity through events like Multicultural Day illustrates the critical role of partnerships in raising community awareness about the demographic changes and the needs of newcomers. Such partnerships are also pivotal in facilitating information sharing and integration activities, as evidenced by initiatives like the Multicultural Hub, which not only connects newcomers with various services but also creates avenues for social integration and community involvement.

The Maple Ridge Library has emerged as a pivotal partner in disseminating information about service providers in the area and fostering collaboration with them. By offering space for various groups to host their programs, such as the English Conversational Group, the library plays a crucial role in facilitating community engagement and integration for newcomers. One of the standout initiatives hosted at the library is the Multicultural Hub, which stands as a critical convergence point for multiple service agencies. This hub enables these agencies to inform newcomers about the available services, enhancing the collaboration between agencies and underscoring the library's indispensable role as a key information gateway. Through these efforts, the Maple Ridge

Library not only serves as a central repository of knowledge and resources but also actively contributes to the social integration and support of newcomers within the community.

"I went to the library the first month I was here and I found some program for immigrants that served as my first contact... And later I found some group in church and I found some program called 'Writing Home'. That's why I was writing some of my stories... but lately I've been coming here to this English Conversational Group in the library and I know new people."

The significance of wrap-around services for the holistic support of newcomers is highlighted through the collaborative initiatives of organizations like Work BC, SUCCESS, and ISS of BC. These services are crucial for the smooth integration of newcomers and their families into the community. An example of such effective collaboration is between Work BC and the Douglas College Career Paths for Skilled Immigrants (Career Paths) program. Work BC details their joint strategy, emphasizing their strong partnership with the Career Paths program, which is also dedicated to supporting newcomers. They aim to provide a wide array of wrap-around services, stepping in to offer daycare support when tuition costs are covered by the Career Paths program, or providing transportation assistance if needed, while the Career Paths program takes care of tuition fees. This approach is focused on ensuring the effective provision of wrap-around services. This collaboration showcases the beneficial impact of uniting resources and services to provide comprehensive support to newcomers. Yet, it also brings to light the challenge of raising awareness among service providers about the possibilities and significant advantages of such collaborative efforts, ensuring that newcomers have access to the most efficient and complete support possible.

The Ridge Meadows Ukrainian Welcoming Committee stands out as a significant example of a community-wide initiative aimed at providing comprehensive support to newcomers, encompassing housing, transportation, childcare, and food bank services. Although this initiative has since been disbanded, its existence highlighted the crucial impact of collaborative efforts in addressing the varied needs of newcomers. Additionally, it's worth mentioning the collaboration between the Friends in Need Food Bank and the Ridge Meadows Senior's Center, which plays an essential role in ensuring food security for seniors in the community. This partnership further illustrates the value of cooperative endeavors in serving different segments of the community effectively.

In summary, key informants have stressed the significance of enhancing collaboration and partnerships for better servicing newcomers, advocating for augmented support and expanded budgets for these service providers. There's a call for a more pronounced municipal involvement in financially backing groups offering newcomer services, proposing the creation of an ad hoc fund for local assistance, underlining the community's collective approach towards welcoming and aiding newcomers in Ridge Meadows.

Challenges and Barriers to Collaboration and Partnerships

The key informants underscored several challenges and barriers that impede effective collaboration and partnerships in serving newcomers. These hurdles include the complexities of coordinating efforts to meet the diverse needs of newcomers, resource constraints that limit the provision of culturally specific services, and the difficulties in engaging with a variety of community partners due to different program structures and eligibility criteria. Addressing these challenges necessitates creative problem-solving, tapping into community resources, and promoting open communication among organizations. Such strategies are essential for streamlining support and services for newcomers, ensuring a more integrated and efficient approach to service delivery.

Work BC's comprehensive wrap-around supports for employment are highlighted as a key complement to the services offered by other organizations. However, there exists a notable need for improved awareness among service providers regarding the full range of services available. This enhanced understanding is crucial to ensure that newcomers receive holistic support, effectively eliminating service duplication or gaps. Work BC elaborates on this point, emphasizing their capability to offer additional support for transportation and short-term training that could benefit newcomers, particularly in demonstrating their English language proficiency. This approach underscores the importance of collaborative engagement among service providers, dispelling misconceptions about competition for clients. Work BC clarifies that their funding perspective does not view assistance as "double dipping" but rather as an opportunity to provide support where it is most needed, highlighting a model of cooperation that prioritizes the well-being and successful integration of newcomers above all.

Role of Local and Provincial Government

Interviews with a Council Member from the City of Pitt Meadows have highlighted that while some city councillors are actively involved in supporting newcomers, this support is largely informal and volunteer-based, facilitated through personal connections made at community events or direct outreach. Notably, there is no specific mandate or policy at the city council level in Pitt Meadows that directly focuses on the integration and support of newcomers. This absence of formalized support mechanisms represents a significant opportunity for policy development and enhancement of support structures. A Coordinator of Recreation Access working for the City of Maple Ridge also noted that while the city's programs are inclusive, there are no specific initiatives targeted specifically at newcomers or different cultural groups. Most initiatives to support newcomers are in collaboration with the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), which acts as the primary contact point for inquiries regarding services and support for newcomers.

At the provincial level, the role is more structured, with responsibilities including setting regulations, allocating funding for programs, and organizing service providers and resources efficiently. The LIP plays a critical role at this level too, serving as the connector and main contact for matters related to newcomer support and services. The provincial government has made strides in adapting immigration services and programs to better serve newcomers, including enhancing access to education and providing immediate financial assistance to those granted refugee status, underscoring a commitment to continually improving the support infrastructure for newcomers. Despite these structured efforts, there remains a need for greater collaboration and

improved resource allocation to address challenges such as language barriers and the professional integration of internationally trained professionals.

From a governmental perspective, there are several challenges in providing adequate support to newcomers in Ridge Meadows. The delineation of responsibilities between the local and provincial levels can complicate the provision of support services, with local efforts focusing on community integration through informal means and provincial efforts aimed at more systematic support through policy and funding. There is a pressing need for both levels of government to develop and implement specific policies and programs that directly support the integration and well-being of newcomers. Enhancing the collaboration between local governments, provincial agencies, and organizations like the LIP can lead to more effective support systems, addressing both immediate and long-term needs of newcomers in Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge.

RCMP Engagement and Support

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) engage with immigrant communities primarily during service calls, where they often encounter significant challenges related to language barriers. These barriers can impede effective communication during service calls, investigations, and community events. While the RCMP has some translation services at their disposal, the lack of 24/7 availability presents difficulties in ensuring real-time communication. In response, there is an ongoing effort to increase the RCMP's diversity, with a focus on recruiting officers fluent in multiple languages. This strategy aims to enhance trust and facilitate better interactions with immigrant populations, addressing the critical need for effective communication.

The RCMP, despite not having specific programs dedicated to newcomers, actively collaborates with the Multicultural Hub located at the library to reach out to immigrant communities. Through this partnership, the RCMP can share information about available services and support, which is instrumental in aiding the integration process and fostering a deeper understanding between the RCMP and these communities. Part of building trust with immigrants, particularly those with previous negative experiences with law enforcement, involves the RCMP's commitment to increasing its diversity, thereby creating a more inclusive and understanding law enforcement presence.

A concerning issue raised by a key informant is the need for the RCMP to intensify efforts in educating newcomers and immigrants about their rights in Canada, especially to protect them from exploitation in employment and housing arrangements. A cited example involved a newcomer being exploited by a landlord, who coerced her into cleaning his house in exchange for reduced rent, taking advantage of her unfamiliarity with local laws and rights. This incident highlights the critical necessity for enhanced support and readily accessible information for newcomers, ensuring they are well-informed and protected against such exploitative practices.

Strategic Priorities for Newcomer Integration

As the communities of Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie Nation grow and diversify, the successful integration of newcomers into these communities is increasingly crucial. The research conducted has highlighted the significant challenges newcomers encounter, as well as the services currently available to assist them. Based on these findings, three strategic priorities have been established to tackle essential areas needing immediate and dedicated focus.

These priorities aim to enhance the overall quality of life for newcomers by fostering social inclusion, supporting employment opportunities, and increasing access to essential information and services. Each priority is designed to build upon existing resources while introducing innovative solutions to bridge gaps in service provision. By focusing on these key areas, we aim to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for all newcomers, facilitating their successful integration into the community and enabling them to thrive.

The following sections will detail the specific actions and initiatives under each priority, grounded in the findings from the research project and tailored to meet the identified needs of newcomers in Ridge Meadows. These targeted strategies will help to ensure that our community not only welcomes newcomers but also provides them with the necessary tools and support to build fulfilling lives in their new home.

Priority One: Promote Social Inclusion

Newcomers in Ridge Meadows encounter significant barriers to social inclusion, primarily due to limited communal spaces and opportunities for cultural engagement. The research identified a lack of venues and programming that facilitate multicultural interactions, which is crucial for building a sense of belonging and community. Despite existing community programs and events, there is a persistent challenge in offering activities that effectively include all demographics, particularly First Nations and other underrepresented groups. Additionally, cultural misunderstandings and the absence of widespread cultural sensitivity training further inhibit the social integration of newcomers.

The current services supporting social inclusion in Ridge Meadows are facilitated through community centers, local libraries, and non-profit organizations that organize cultural events and social gatherings. However, these services are often underfunded and lack the capacity to reach and effectively support the diverse needs of the growing newcomer population. There is also an emphasis on informal social support systems, which, while valuable, are not sufficient to meet the structured needs of newcomers seeking to establish deep community ties.

Key Recommended Actions:

1. Develop Community Spaces for Multicultural Interaction:

- Establish dedicated community centers that can host events and activities encouraging multicultural interactions. This will address the current lack of communal spaces for gathering and cultural exchange.
- Implement programs that include First Nations and all community members, promoting a multicultural sharing environment.

2. Enhance Programming for Social Connection:

- Increase funding and resources for programming that facilitates informal ways of connecting, such as social meetups, cultural festivals, and sports events.
- Utilize city resources in Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge to facilitate these community-building activities, ensuring they are accessible to all demographics, including newcomers and First Nations.

3. Incorporate Cultural Sensitivity Training:

- Provide cultural sensitivity training for all city and community organization staff to enhance their ability to interact positively with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Encourage community members to participate in these training sessions to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment.

4. Identify Community Champions to Enhance Support and Social Integration:

- Recruit and designate community champions from various sectors—including business, education, community organizations, and local government—who are committed to advancing the integration of newcomers.
- These champions will be instrumental in rallying community support, initiating and leading projects that promote social inclusion, and serving as advocates for newcomers' needs at community and policy-making levels.
- Through their leadership and visibility, these champions will help to cultivate a network of support, encouraging wider community participation and fostering a welcoming environment that actively engages and integrates newcomers into the social fabric of Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie Nation.

Priority Two: Support Employment

Employment emerges as a critical area where newcomers face substantial hurdles, notably in the recognition of foreign credentials and the scarcity of local job opportunities aligned with their skills and experiences. The research highlighted that newcomers often struggle with navigating the Canadian job market, encountering difficulties in understanding job application processes and workplace culture. Furthermore, limited local opportunities force many to seek employment outside the community, which can hinder their long-term settlement and integration in Ridge Meadows.

Services aimed at supporting employment among newcomers include job fairs, employment workshops, and career counseling provided by local agencies such as Work BC and various immigrant service organizations. Despite these initiatives, there remains a need for greater coordination with local businesses and expanded programs that specifically address the unique challenges faced by immigrants, such as credential recognition and professional integration.

Key Recommended Actions:

1. Organize Local Job Fairs:

- Collaborate with the municipalities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows to organize job fairs that connect newcomers with local employers, enhancing visibility of available work opportunities.

- Facilitate participation of a broad range of employers, including those offering entry-level to specialized positions that match the skills of the newcomers.

2. Expand Employment Support Services:

- Increase support for employment agencies like Work BC and local businesses to provide workshops and seminars on Canadian workplace culture, resume building, and job application processes tailored for newcomers.

3. Promote Recognition of International Qualifications:

- Work with educational and professional certification bodies to streamline processes for recognizing international qualifications, reducing barriers to employment in regulated professions.

Priority Three: Increase Access to Information and Services

Access to information and services is a significant challenge for newcomers in Ridge Meadows, exacerbated by an overwhelming demand placed on the limited number of settlement workers. The research pointed out that newcomers often struggle with finding and accessing necessary services, including healthcare, education, and housing, due to language barriers, lack of awareness about available resources, and insufficient personalized guidance.

The landscape of services available to assist newcomers in accessing information and resources includes settlement agencies, community navigators, and informational workshops. However, these resources are stretched thin due to high demand and limited staffing. Language and integration services are available but require expansion to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. Furthermore, the current services could benefit from incorporating digital solutions to reach a broader audience and provide more accessible and efficient support to newcomers navigating their new environment.

Key Recommended Actions:

1. Boost Settlement Support Staff:

- Address the issue of only having two settlement workers for all newcomers in Ridge Meadows by funding additional positions, including navigators and language instructors to help newcomers access services and integrate more effectively.

2. Enhance Language and Integration Services:

- Expand the availability of language classes and integration services by increasing funding to local organizations like the Immigrant Services Society of BC and LINC programs.
- Develop online platforms to provide access to these services more broadly, ensuring newcomers can access them from home if transportation or childminding is a barrier.

3. Implement Community Navigators:

- Introduce community navigator roles to assist newcomers in finding and accessing various services such as healthcare, education, and housing.
- These navigators should be multilingual and culturally competent to effectively support the diverse newcomer population.

4. Innovative Methods for Information Dissemination:

- Implement new strategies to reach newcomers with vital information, such as mailing out letters to homes in areas with high concentrations of newcomers, detailing available local services and community events in multiple languages.
- Utilize digital platforms and social media to engage with newcomers actively, and partner with local businesses, schools, and religious organizations to distribute informational materials in places frequently visited by newcomers.

Appendix A – Key Informant Interview Guide

Section A: Background Information

Organization Name:

Interviewee Name:

Interviewee Role/Position:

Description of Role/Position:

Time and Date of Interview:

Section B: Organizational Perspective

1. What services does your organization provide for newcomers in Ridge Meadows?
 - a. Which services are most in demand by newcomers?
2. Since 2021, how has your organization evolved in providing services to newcomers?
 - a. Have you introduced services in additional languages to meet the needs of a diverse newcomer population?
 - b. What changes have you observed in the percentage of newcomers among your clients since 2021?
 - c. Have there been training programs implemented for staff or volunteers to enhance their effectiveness with newcomers?
3. What are your organization's greatest successes in the past two years working with newcomers?
4. What challenges have you faced in the past two years working with newcomers?
 - a. Have you been able to overcome these challenges? If so, how?

Section C: Community Perspective

5. Have newcomer demographics and support needs changed over the past two years?
 - a. Are there new or persisting challenges faced by specific newcomer groups?
 - b. Have other social and economic conditions in Ridge Meadows shifted and impacted newcomers?
6. How has the overall landscape of services for newcomers in the Ridge Meadows area transformed since 2021? (e.g., more or less service availability, easier or more difficult access, etc.)
7. Which newcomer support needs have been most effectively met in the past two years?
8. From your perspective, where are there gaps in services?
 - a. Are there barriers to accessing services?
9. How has the local context in Ridge Meadows influenced the newcomer experience?
10. What would you say are the top three to five priorities for enhancing newcomer services in Ridge Meadows?
11. What resources or support do organizations now need to effectively serve newcomers in the ongoing context?
12. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

Government Questions

1. How do you see the role of the provincial government in facilitating the integration of immigrants into the community?
2. Can you discuss any specific programs or initiatives introduced in the last three years aimed at facilitating newcomer integration?
3. What have been the greatest successes and challenges?
4. What partnerships between the government and local organizations have been most effective in supporting immigrant communities?
5. Can you share insights into any current or planned policies aimed at improving services and support for newcomers?
6. In what ways can our research project contribute to shaping more inclusive and supportive policies for newcomers in the future?

RCMP Questions

1. How does the police department engage with immigrant communities to ensure their safety and their understanding of local laws?
2. Can you describe any specific programs or initiatives aimed at supporting newcomers in understanding their rights and responsibilities within the community?
3. Have there been any notable challenges or successes in building trust between law enforcement and immigrant populations?
4. Are there any specific types of support or resources that the police department believes would further aid in the successful integration of immigrants?
5. How does the department gather feedback from immigrant communities to improve its services and interactions?

Appendix B – Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

Thank you all for joining us in this important phase of our research. As we continue our work with the Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie Local Immigration Partnership, your insights remain crucial. This phase builds upon our initial findings and discussions from 2021 and aims to delve deeper into the evolving needs and experiences of newcomers in our community. Your participation and shared experiences will significantly contribute to enhancing the support systems for immigrants in our region.

Verbal Consent

This focus group discussion requires your participation for approximately one hour to delve into your experiences and challenges as a newcomer in Ridge Meadows. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the liberty to not answer any questions or to leave the discussion at any time. We ensure that your identity will be kept confidential, as our goal is to gather collective insights for improvement. As a token of our appreciation for your valuable time and contributions, you will be offered a \$25 Visa Gift Card. Please be aware that there are minimal risks involved in this discussion. However, the information shared will be securely stored and exclusively used to inform the strategic planning efforts of the Local Immigration Partnership. You are free to withdraw your participation at any point without any consequences. In keeping with our discussion today, we ask for your cooperation to respect others while they speak, provide equal opportunities for all to contribute, and maintain the confidentiality of our conversation. Also note that the discussion will be recorded for transcription and note taking later.

Now, may I have your verbal consent to proceed under these conditions?

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Could we do a round of table to introduce ourselves. Please state:

- What year you arrived in Canada
- What country you were born in
- If different from your birth country, what country did you immigrate from to Canada

Integration Experiences:

"Can you share your initial experiences integrating into the community? What were some challenges or successes you encountered?"

Employment Challenges:

"Have you experienced challenges or barriers in finding employment or work opportunities?"

Community Support and Resources:

"What types of community support or resources have you found most helpful? What types of community support or resources are lacking?"

Future Expectations:

"What are your expectations or hopes for the future in terms of community integration and opportunities?"

Education Utilization:

"Have you been able to utilize your past education or training since moving to Canada?"

Language Barriers:

"Have language differences affected your daily life and integration into the community?"

Cultural Diversity:

"How do you feel your cultural background is represented and accepted in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows?"