

# SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK WELCOME AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia  
Halifax, NS

**Area of Practice:**  
Promoting Welcoming Communities

**Video:**  
[https://youtu.be/oY4b\\_BFPEnA](https://youtu.be/oY4b_BFPEnA)

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**

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The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) is a non-profit organization based in Halifax, NS. It was created by the merger of Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association and Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre in 2009. ISANS is the largest immigrant-serving organization in Atlantic Canada and provides a wide range of services to immigrants, from refugee resettlement to professional programs, from family counselling to English in the Workplace.

In 2015, the Government of Canada made a commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees. Similar to other jurisdictions, Nova Scotia saw a surge in newcomers arriving from Syria. Community and sponsorship groups, social service providers, and government representatives were exploring ways in which to respond to their arrival. Due to Nova Scotia's long, sordid history of racism and colonialism, they were concerned about the safety and potential non-welcoming climate that these newcomers might face.

The Welcome Ambassador Program emerged out of this context, that is, to prepare Nova Scotians to welcome refugees and newcomers into the community. It was recognized that greater efforts were needed to provide the community with useful and accurate information, as well as skills and tools to address racism and actively create welcoming and inclusive environments. It was felt that Ambassadors could be deployed throughout the community and province, multiplying the efforts of immigrant serving organizations far beyond what they could accomplish on their own.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM**

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**Name:**

Welcome Ambassador Program

**Description:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program is a 12-hour training program, organized into four sessions and delivered over the course of 4-6 weeks using a train-the-trainer model. It equips participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to develop and implement Welcome Ambassador workshops within their social, professional, and volunteer networks. Participants build cultural awareness skills; examine the understanding of their role in systemic oppression; develop skills and knowledge around power, privilege and ally-ship; develop knowledge and awareness about refugee newcomers; and participate actively in making Nova Scotia a more welcoming and inclusive province. To be an Ambassador, participants must commit to: attending all four training sessions; undertaking two activities that promote welcoming and inclusion; and adhering to the principles of diversity, inclusion, and equity.

**Goal(s):**

- To provide participants with the tools necessary to create inclusive, equitable, and welcoming communities.

- To encourage participants to think creatively about where they can have influence and to give participants information and tools they can use to counter negative sentiment and opinion concerning refugees.

**Target Client Group(s):**

Volunteers, service providers, private refugee sponsorship groups, government employees, business groups, and anyone interested in building their skills and knowledge to tackle the barriers newcomer refugees face in the community and workplace.

**Delivery Partner(s):**

N/A

**Human Resource(s):**

The Welcome Ambassador Program has one program facilitator.

**Funding:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program was initially funded by United Way Halifax, and is currently funded by the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. A fee-for-service model is used for organizations requesting customized, in-house Welcome Ambassador training for staff (e.g., Nova Scotia Community College, local libraries).

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## **KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE**

**Effective:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program uses an application process to screen participants. Applicants must agree to support values of welcoming and inclusion, and commit to undertaking two actions in their community before they are accepted into the program. It also incorporates adult education principles, such as experiential learning and peer-to-peer discussion, and is offered over 4-6 weeks (vs. 1-2 days) to ground the learning.

**Efficient:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program uses a train-the-trainer approach. Participants receive the tools, resources, and support needed to complete their two activities, and through these activities they engage other community members in creating a welcoming and inclusive community (splash and ripple effect). ISANS also uses pre-existing resources and adapts them to meet local needs, rather than creating all their own materials from scratch.

**Relevant:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program was conceived as a one-off program to support the integration of Syrian refugees into the community, but demand has not yet waned. Participant feedback is collected on an ongoing basis, and the program is constantly being adapted to ensure it remains useful and relevant.

**Sustainable:**

Staff continue to explore different ways of offering and/or expanding the program, such as incorporating technology and developing more online components, so that it is accessible to Nova Scotians in remote communities.

**Transferable:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program is easily replicable. A template has been developed, which can be adapted to other locations.

**Innovative and Forward Thinking:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program maintains an experimental nature; staff constantly test out new ideas and technologies. For example, a training session was recently conducted with participants simultaneously in five different communities. The facilitator met with one group in-person, and then brought in four other groups via livestream / teleconference.

**Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:**

The Welcome Ambassador Program differs from other anti-racism, anti-oppression, and intercultural competence programs in that it is a public program, offered free of charge to many clients, and focuses specifically on refugees and newcomers. The program is also longer in duration than other programs, thereby creating opportunities for participants to develop deeper insights into the issues at hand. Upon completion, Ambassadors become part of an online community, where they share information about activities, events, media, etc.

**High Client Uptake:**

The Welcome Ambassador continues to have a waitlist. Each session is offered at a different time of day or on different days of the week to ensure that it is accessible to a variety of participants. Each session is promoted through social media, word of mouth, community volunteers, etc.

**High Client Retention:**

Most participants complete more than two activities in their community. Many participants also become volunteers with ISANS or remain connected via social media, emails, and community events, once they have completed the program.

**Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:**

An independent evaluation was conducted with participants of the first Welcome Ambassador Program cohort. Overall, the Welcome Ambassador Program received an extremely positive assessment, accomplishing its original objectives and more. All participants felt better equipped to welcome newcomers and support diversity. The training was especially helpful for participants new to settlement services, as well as those located outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality. All participants reported using at least some elements of the training in their work and engagement with newcomers. All participants interviewed adapted the training to suit a variety of purposes in a variety of contexts, from using it to “cultivate empathy” in daily interactions and conversations, to informing colleagues, to training co-members of refugee sponsorship groups and/or groups of volunteers assisting refugee newcomers.

## **PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY**

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In 2016, an evaluation of the Welcome Ambassador Program was conducted independently and voluntarily by five university-based researchers. The goals of the evaluation were to understand the program's objectives and determine whether or not they were met; to offer an assessment of the successes and failures of the program from the vantage point of participants; to offer an assessment of the successes and failures of the program's modules from the vantage point of participants; and to provide recommendations on how the program could be adjusted if offered in future iterations. An online survey was conducted with 22 out of 24 program participants to understand the extent to which the Welcome Ambassador Program altered participants' opinions of newcomers. Interviews were also conducted with 12 out of 24 program participants to understand motivations for taking the program, expectations, objectives, and overall experience. Funds to support the evaluation were provided by Saint Mary's University.

The Welcome Ambassador Program conducts ongoing reviews and evaluations. A range of quantitative and qualitative data is collected through evaluation surveys, follow-up events with Ambassadors, and more. Results are compiled and reviewed, and program methodology and content are updated as needed.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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### **ISANS**

<http://www.isans.ca>

### **Welcome Ambassador Program**

<http://www.isans.ca/get-involved/welcome-ambassador-program/>

### **Independent Evaluation of the Immigrant Settlement Association of Nova Scotia's Welcome Ambassador Training**

[http://howardramos.ca/index\\_htm\\_files/ISANS%20Evaluation%20Final.pdf](http://howardramos.ca/index_htm_files/ISANS%20Evaluation%20Final.pdf)