

# SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK MAKE IT! SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR NEWCOMER WOMEN

Vancouver Community College  
Vancouver, BC

## Area of Practice:

Services and Supports for Vulnerable Immigrant Groups

## Video:

<https://youtu.be/KY5kStWsCns>

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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Vancouver Community College is a publicly-funded post-secondary institution based in Vancouver, BC. Established in 1965, it offers programming in health sciences, hospitality management, automotive trades, culinary and baking arts, and other vocational training. It has a large Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and has been providing English language training to newcomers since its inception. Vancouver Community College has a strong ethos of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and has partnered with a number of immigrant-serving organizations in the Metro Vancouver area.

In 2016, Vancouver Community College launched Entry to Hospitality Careers for Women, a 12-week program to equip immigrant and refugee women with the food safety and hospitality skills needed to work in hotel, senior care home, and restaurant industries. On several occasions, program participants got together and came up with their own small business ideas. This led to the development of Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women, a program combining access to makerspaces (defined in a [2013 report](#) out of Michigan State University as “places where like-minded persons gather to work on personal projects, share tools and expertise as well as learn from each other”) and English language and essential skills training for newcomer women to make it as entrepreneurs using a social enterprise model.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM**

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**Name:**

Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women

**Description:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program uses a “collective business model” design (inspired by co-operatives) to support newcomer women who are unable to pursue business opportunities individually as solo entrepreneurs. It combines content-based language learning and entrepreneurship skill training in a supportive and goal-oriented environment. Participants build their English language and vocational skills, gain basic Canadian business knowledge, and learn to operate a business collective and create products that are marketable in the local context. The program uses a cohort model; each cohort meets initially for 18 hours per week over a 10-week period and then works together, with guidance, over the next year to develop their business. In Metro Vancouver, Vancouver Community College partnered with DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society to run two cohorts, one focused on sewing and the other focused on cooking. Vancouver Community College provided the makerspaces (i.e., a fully equipped commercial kitchen and a fully equipped sewing laboratory with industrial sewing machines and other equipment) and professional instruction, while DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society provided business development and training expertise. Through the program two collectives were formed, Mama’s Hands (cooking) and Sewmates Craft (sewing), and the latter continues to operate with ongoing support from Vancouver Community College and DIVERSEcity Community Resources

Society. The program model was also tested in a rural context through Okanagan College and South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services.

**Goal(s):**

The goals of the Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program are to provide experiential learning that combines language, vocational, and business skills for women while building social inclusion and integration; to pilot a model for post-secondary institutions to partner with immigrant-serving organizations on innovative projects that leverage the resources of both partners; to field-test the model for transferability to a smaller or rural community context; and to build on learnings for continuity and sustainability of programming beyond the program’s end date.

**Target Client Group(s):**

Newcomer women with a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) 5 or higher. Participants are selected based on the following criteria: interest in entrepreneurship, willingness to work with other immigrant women in pursuing a business together, basic vocational skills, and ability to commit for up to one year (for training and business development).

**Delivery Partner(s):**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program is co-delivered with DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, Okanagan College, and South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services.

**Human Resource(s):**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program requires a full-time project manager, a part-time administrative assistant, and a project evaluator (optional). Each training cohort also requires a business instructor, a communications / leadership instructor, and a vocational instructor. Childminding should also be provided to enable newcomer women with young children to participate.

**Funding:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program is funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through the Service Delivery Improvement Fund.

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

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**Effective:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program uses a collective business model that allows participants to concurrently learn about the business and employment context in Canada, access professional facilities and equipment, build strong networks, develop English language and vocational skills, and experience business. The program model was co-developed by a public post-secondary institution and an immigrant-serving organization. Each partner was committed to mutual learning, openness, and trust, and contributed their knowledge and expertise into the design and implementation of the program.

**Efficient:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program leverages the strengths of public post-secondary institutions, which have access to professional facilities, equipment, and instruction, and the strengths of local immigrant-serving organizations, which have expertise in immigrant settlement and integration and business training and development.

**Relevant:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program addresses settlement and economic integration barriers that newcomer women may face, including lack of knowledge about small business and entrepreneurship in Canada, lack of social networks, and lack of language and literacy skills for legal and business documents. Some newcomer women are not able to work full-time, but are able to contribute their time and skills to a social enterprise on a part-time basis.

**Sustainable:**

A non-profit society called the Intercultural Women's Maker Society was created as a platform for participants of the Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program, and potentially other newcomer women, to continue with their business activities. It is structured as a "Maker Council" for newcomer women's business collectives, such as Mama's Hands and Sewmates Craft, to further develop their skills and businesses and transition to independence. Both Vancouver Community College and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society have signed agreements with Intercultural Women's Maker Society to provide operational support to the business collectives until July 2021.

**Transferable:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program could be replicated in other communities across Canada. The program model was piloted in a rural context through Okanagan College and South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services, and adapted by Camosun College in Victoria, BC to support immigrants entering farmers' markets. Vancouver Community College has also used the learnings to develop a similar program for post-secondary students in their fashion, jewellery, and graphic design programs. A toolkit was developed to provide guidance to other post-secondary institutions interested in partnering with immigrant-serving organizations to support social entrepreneurship of newcomer women in their communities.

**Innovative and Forward Thinking:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program uses a holistic model that combines vocational skills training, English language training, localized business knowledge, and social inclusion and integration within a social entrepreneurship program for newcomer women to overcome barriers to employment. Participants have the opportunity to upgrade their vocational skills and improve employability skills, such as teamwork, leadership and problem-solving skills. The collective business model supports participants in developing a strong social support network that goes beyond ordinary social groups, as they are required to function as a professional team. Through their business endeavours, newcomer women learn about their local community by participating in markets, interacting with customers, and networking with other vendors. By engaging in authentic business activities, participants are also able to upgrade their English language and literacy skills (including financial and digital literacy) and gain confidence through conversations with local residents.

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

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program differs from established program models in that it combines elements of English language training, business, and leadership programs while providing experiential learning opportunities embedded in entrepreneurial activities. Participants learn by doing, such as participating in farmers' markets or craft fairs, and then by reflecting on their experiences.

**High Client Uptake:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program exceeded its initial target of 10 participants per cohort. Participants were recruited through community agencies in Metro Vancouver.

**High Client Retention:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program had high client retention. All participants completed the 10-week training program and moved into the guided business development process where they were able to apply their learned skills and knowledge into real-life business activities. The program was run on a part-time basis so that participants could continue to manage the multiple demands in their lives, such as domestic responsibilities, childcare, and/or part-time work. This enabled retention throughout the length of the program, as participants learned how to incorporate entrepreneurship into their daily lives by organizing their time and managing their own expectations and commitment levels. By working as a team, they were able to support each other and pool together their limited time and resources.

**Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:**

The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program used a learning-oriented program evaluation model, which engaged participants in continuous reflection about their experience and used the data to help improve the program. All participants reported a stronger sense of belonging in their communities and in Canada, which came from interacting with customers and vendors at markets. By making sales, they also felt a strong sense of accomplishment and acceptance / recognition of their efforts. All participants also reported feeling more comfortable using English as well as making decisions about life in Canada because of their enhanced knowledge about their local community, which they gained through attending local fairs, events, and markets. Two business collectives were formed as a result of the program, Mama's Hands (cooking) and Sewmates Craft (sewing). Sewmates Craft is currently producing and selling cloth masks as part of the Intercultural Women's Maker Society Cloth Facemask Initiative, and sold over 2,700 cloth masks between April and July 2020.

**PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY**

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The Make It! Social Entrepreneurship for Newcomer Women program adopted the notion of entrepreneurship as experiential learning, which sees the entrepreneur as an agent who learns through a complex process of planning, doing, and reflecting. The theoretical foundation was provided by [Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning](#). As such, the program did not use a traditional

performance measurement and evaluation approach; instead, it used a learning-oriented program evaluation model that engaged participants in continuous reflection about their experience as they moved from training to marketplace and used these qualitative data to improve the program. Data were collected from all participants on an emergent and as needed basis through various reflective exercises, allowing participants to evaluate their own learning, identify their strengths and weaknesses, share their likes and dislikes in the process, and explore ways to improve their collective business as a team. Their reflections were captured through conversations, worksheets, and notes taken by staff as ethnographic data. For example, a written assessment and visioning exercise was conducted to assess participants' commitment to the program and business collective, understand how the program helped them grow, and gather input on what could be done to help them grow more as entrepreneurs in a collective. A final evaluation workshop was also conducted so that participants could reflect on their experience and explore their "entrepreneur identity". All the data were collected and analyzed for the purposes of improving the program. Adjustments, or pivoting, are common during the organic process of business development, and the same developmental approach was used for the program. Challenges that emerged included balancing collective versus individual needs, identifying leaders within the collective, ensuring equity in sharing business revenue, and continuing to motivate all participants as a team, all of which are common challenges in business co-operatives and other forms of collectives.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**Vancouver Community College**

<https://vcc.ca>

**Sewmates Craft (Facebook)**

<https://www.facebook.com/sewmatescraft1/>

**Sewmates Craft (Instagram)**

[https://www.instagram.com/sewmatescraft\\_/?hl=zh-hk](https://www.instagram.com/sewmatescraft_/?hl=zh-hk)