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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING WITH GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED REFUGEES AND REFUGEE CLAIMANTS

AGENDA

PART 1

Adapting Volunteer Engagement Programs to a Virtual Environment – Andrew Lusztyk

PART 2

Virtual Volunteering in the Welcome Groups for Refugee Claimants Pilot Program – Anna Hill

PART 3

Volunteer Engagement in Refugee Integration in the Context of the Pandemic – Natasha Comeau

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ADAPTING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS TO A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

The Welcome Group Program connects vulnerable newcomers to a "Welcome Group" of 5+ volunteers for 6 months of social support tailored to the specific integration priorities of each household.

Key program features:
- Volunteer training and support
- Group matches
- Translation/interpretation support
- Evaluation & iterative learning
- Preference matching
- Collaboration with agencies
- Use of online communication tools to supplement in-person social support

INTEGRATION PRIORITIES

THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM:

GOVERMENT ASSISTED-REFUGEE INTEGRATION PRIORITIES

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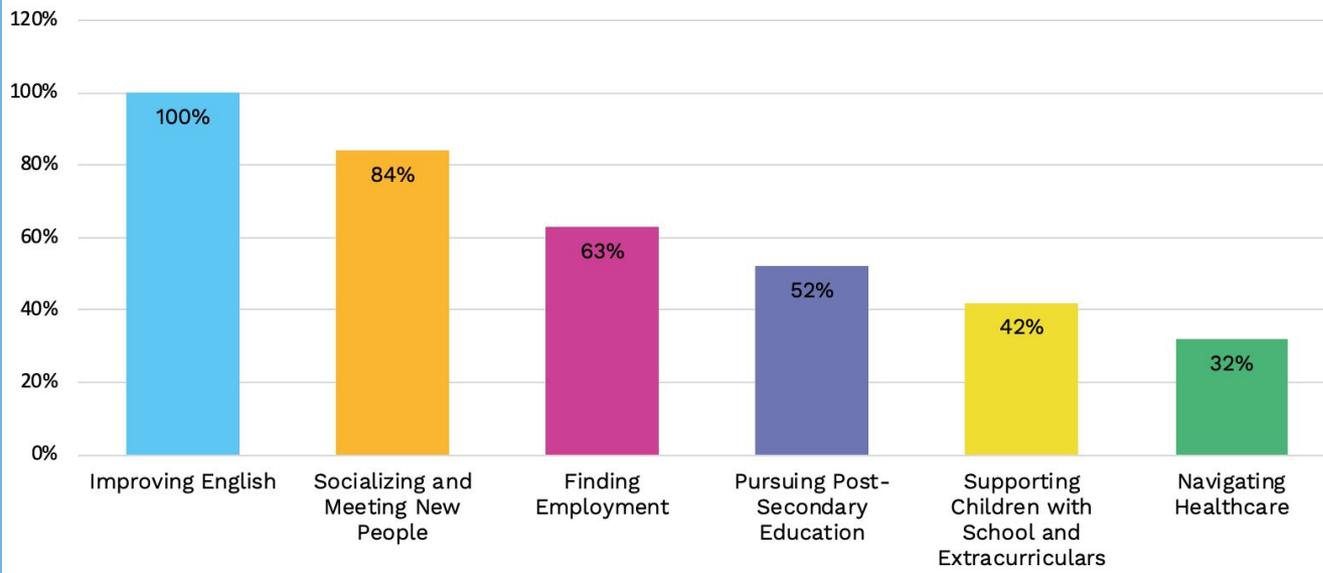
INTEGRATION PRIORITIES

WHAT ARE...
SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

togetherproject.ca

Social Bonds

Newcomers develop relationships with people within their own community.

Social Bridges

Newcomers develop relationships with members outside of their own community (i.e. Welcome Groups).

Social Links

Newcomers access community and social services and opportunities for engagement.

THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF THE PANDEMIC

REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT:

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOUR MATCH'S ABILITY TO CONNECT?

Category	Percentage
Very positively affected	3%
Somewhat positively affected	6%
Not at all affected	17%
Somewhat negatively affected	22%
Very negatively affected	53%
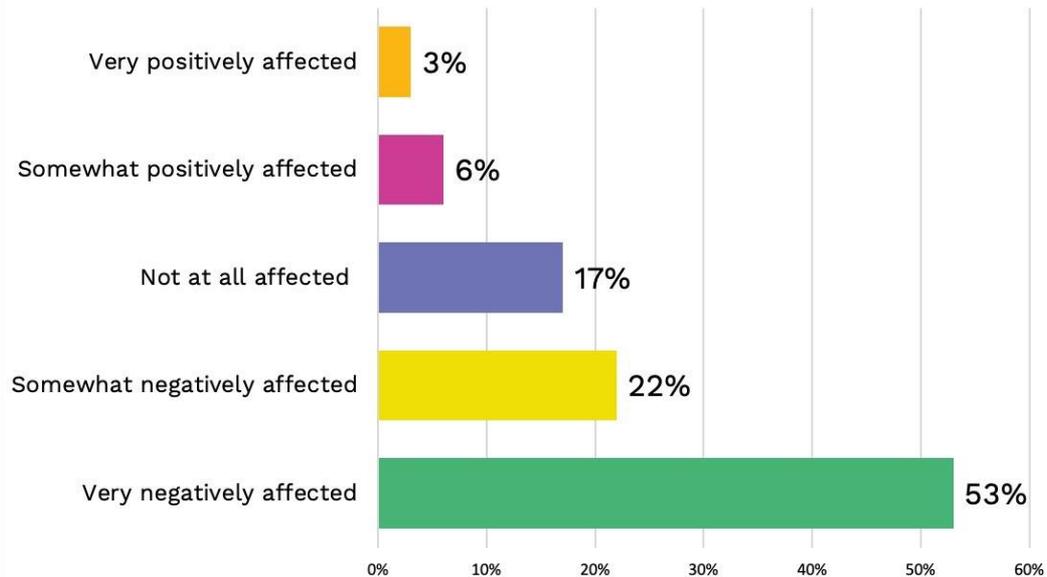
ADAPTATION AS AN INNOVATION CYCLE

Innovation Cycle
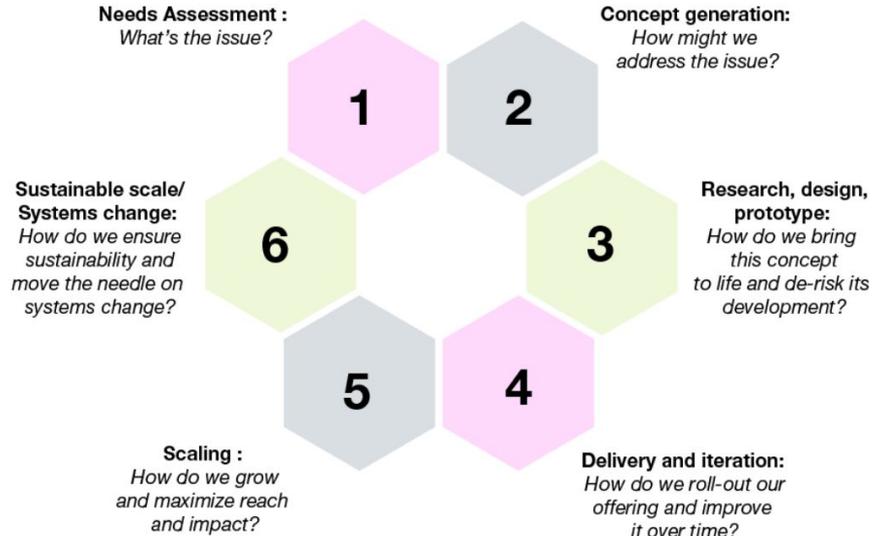
Needs Assessment : *What's the issue?* — 1

Concept generation: *How might we address the issue?* — 2

Research, design, prototype: *How do we bring this concept to life and de-risk its development?* — 3

Delivery and iteration: *How do we roll-out our offering and improve it over time?* — 4

Scaling : *How do we grow and maximize reach and impact?* — 5

Sustainable scale/ Systems change: *How do we ensure sustainability and move the needle on systems change?* — 6

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CONCEPT GENERATION

Our needs assessment interviews and surveys revealed both ...

... challenges:

- Shifting priorities
- New goalposts for the match
- Broken routines
- Technological issues
- Personal dilemmas
- Frustration

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CONCEPT GENERATION

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... challenges:

- Shifting priorities
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- Broken routines
- Technological issues
- Personal dilemmas
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... and ideas for how to address them:

- Define new roles for volunteers, set expectations, and train accordingly
- Shift processes (recruitment, onboarding, training, etc.) online and keep them current
- Revise criteria for participation
- Update resources based on needs
- Find and use alternative storytelling and community-building tools

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PROVIDING REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT TO REFUGEE NEWCOMERS

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Check in.

Volunteers can check in to see how newcomers are managing during this difficult time.

Socialize.

Social distancing can be quite isolating for everyone. Volunteers and newcomers can spend time getting to know each other virtually.

Help navigate virtual services.

Volunteers can help newcomers connect with healthcare, education and other services being provided online right now.

Answer questions.

Volunteers can help answer questions about COVID-19 and public health recommendations.

Practice English.

While ESL classes are not running volunteers can help newcomers keep up their English practice over the phone or video chat.

Share resources.

Volunteers can help families find educational resources for their kids and things to keep busy, like online games or virtual museum visits.

STEP 1

Sign up to volunteer at togetherproject.ca

STEP 2

Attend a virtual volunteer orientation to discuss why you want to get involved

STEP 3

Attend a training session to build your capacity to support newcomers

STEP 4

Connect with your Welcome Group and learn about your match (typically within 8 weeks)

VOLUNTEER WITH TOGETHER PROJECT

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STEP 5

Meet your matched newcomer household on WhatsApp

STEP 6

Get started supporting the newcomer household for the next six months

STREAMLINING THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM

WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: TIMELINE

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Month 1 and 2
Program Development

Months 3 and 4
Onboarding/Training

Months 5 to 11
Program Delivery

Month 12
Evaluation

Program Innovation

Resource Development

Agency Partner Coordination

Communications

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteer Onboarding

Vulnerable Sector Check Screenings

Volunteer Training

Vulnerable Newcomer Onboarding

Match Making and Introductions

Match Management

Match Resource Support

Match Issue Resolution

Match Evaluation

Program Iteration

**Previously occurred in person, now occurring remotely

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DELIVERY AND ITERATION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

- Program's built-in iteration means we can constantly adjust based on what is working
- Geographic barriers lowered
- Language barriers heightened
- Newcomer human capital profile plays a large role
- Sorting emergent online volunteer "types" and building that into our matching system

REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT:

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH PROVIDING REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT

Very satisfied	20%
Satisfied	29%
Average	29%
Not very satisfied	15%
Not at all satisfied	8%

(x-axis: 0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30%, 35%)
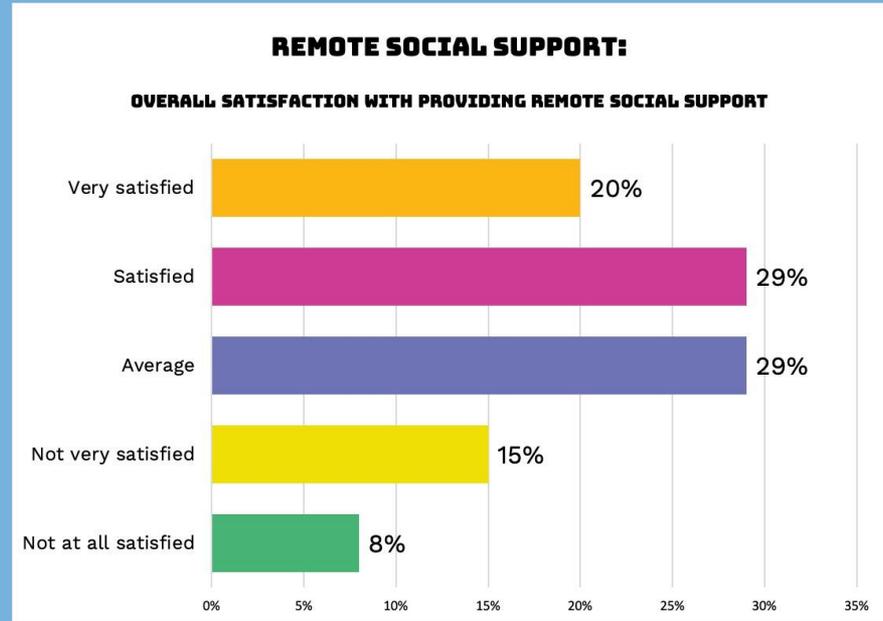
SUCCESS STORIES

The Abd Family
- Newcomer resilience and volunteer perseverance

The Al Tamer Family
- Partnership with TD Bank for virtual volunteering opportunities

'I'm not scared of the virus': He survived war in Syria. Now this refugee worries about keeping up with English lessons

By **Nicholas Keung** Immigration Reporter
Thu., March 26, 2020 ⏱ 4 min. read

JAN 18, 2021

From Aleppo to Mississauga: How one Syrian refugee family's journey ended with newfound hope and community in Canada

Link to article: https://bit.ly/2LGou3o

Link to article: https://go.td.com/3908T7s

WELCOME GROUPS FOR REFUGEE CLAIMANTS PILOT PROGRAM

Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

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- Adapting the Welcome Group program to serve refugee claimants.
- Engaged partnerships with referring agencies, COSTI Immigrant Services and the Crossroads Clinic at Women's College Hospital.
- Understanding the differences between GARs and refugee claimants - RC higher language levels, education, and professional training
- However, RCs have less access to settlement services and precarious status.

HOW DOES THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM NEED TO CHANGE TO SUPPORT THE REFUGEE CLAIMANT DEMOGRAPHIC?

MANY ORGANIZATIONS WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD A WELCOMING COMMUNITY - TOGETHER PROJECT FOCUSES ON:

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Employment Opportunities

✓ **Fostering of Social Capital**

Affordable and Suitable Housing

✓ **Positive Attitudes toward Immigrants, Cultural Diversity, and the Presence of Newcomers in the Community**

Presence of Newcomer-Serving Agencies that Can Successfully Meet the Needs of Newcomers

✓ **Favourable Media Coverage and Representation**

Links between Main Actors Working toward Welcoming Communities

Educational Opportunities

Safety

Accessible and Suitable

Health Care Available and Accessible

Public Transit
Presence of Diverse Religious Organizations

✓ **Social Engagement Opportunities**

Political Participation Opportunities

Positive Relationships with the Police and the Justice System

✓ **Opportunities for Use of Public Space and Recreation Facilities**

Municipal Features and Services Sensitive to the Presence and Needs of Newcomers

This infographic is based on a 2010 reports on the *Characteristics of a Welcoming Community* (Esses, Hamilton, Bennett-AbuAyyash, Burstein)

- Conducted a feasibility study with the Public Good Initiative at the University of Toronto
- Interviewed many refugee claimant-serving agencies in Toronto to determine the appropriate roles and responsibilities for volunteers
- Identified cohorts within refugee claimant demographic most in need of volunteer support:
  - single parent families
  - youth ages 18-28
  - LGBTQ+

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ADAPTING VOLUNTEER RESOURCES AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING TO PREPARE VOLUNTEERS TO SUPPORT REFUGEE CLAIMANTS

REFUGEE CLAIMANTS - RESOURCE LIST GTA

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SECTION 1: LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Resource	About	Contact Information
Legal Aid Ontario	This service is for individuals who have a low-income and legal issues related to housing, immigration/refugee, domestic violence, family, criminal and social benefits. Legal Aid Ontario may be able to assist with payments, represent you at your Refugee Protection Division, prepare a written appeal of your case to the Refugee Appeal Division, prepare a Judicial Review application in the Federal Court, help write a danger opinion and other legal services free of cost.	Telephone: 1-800-667-8258 from Monday to Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. Website: https://www.legalaid.on.ca/services-for-refugee-claimants-2/
Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)	Easy-to-read information about your legal rights. Including immigration and refugee laws. Such as information on sponsoring family, children's right to education, family violence, refugee workers' rights, and more.	Website: https://www.cleo.on.ca/en

www.togetherproject.ca/resources

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- Some aspects of our volunteer training for RCs were similar to our training for GARs i.e. informed consent, trauma informed care, cultural humility, empowerment vs. charity.
- Other aspects changed i.e. the volunteer imperative not to provide any kind of legal advice, the inconsistency of refugee claimants services, the absence of a dedicated caseworker, and the role of Together Project staff in troubleshooting.

TRANSITIONING TO ONLINE PROGRAM DELIVERY - REFUGEE CLAIMANT COMFORT LEVEL WITH TECHNOLOGY
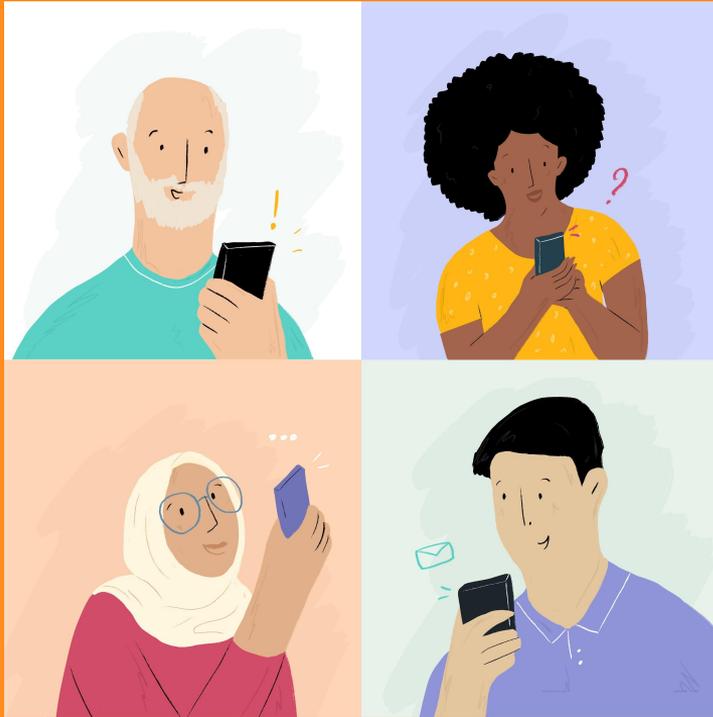
Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

- Many refugee claimants are well-suited for digital settlement with social support.

- While social isolation is a challenge for RC youth, single mothers and LGBTQ+, their higher language levels and comfort with technology allow RCs to benefit greatly from remote social support.

- We use WhatsApp, ZOOM, Mailchimp, & Survey Monkey

- Access to digital devices and internet is critical & a challenge

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SUPPORTING REMOTE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND REFUGEE CLAIMANT INTEGRATION PRIORITIES

THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM:

REFUGEE CLAIMANT INTEGRATION PRIORITIES
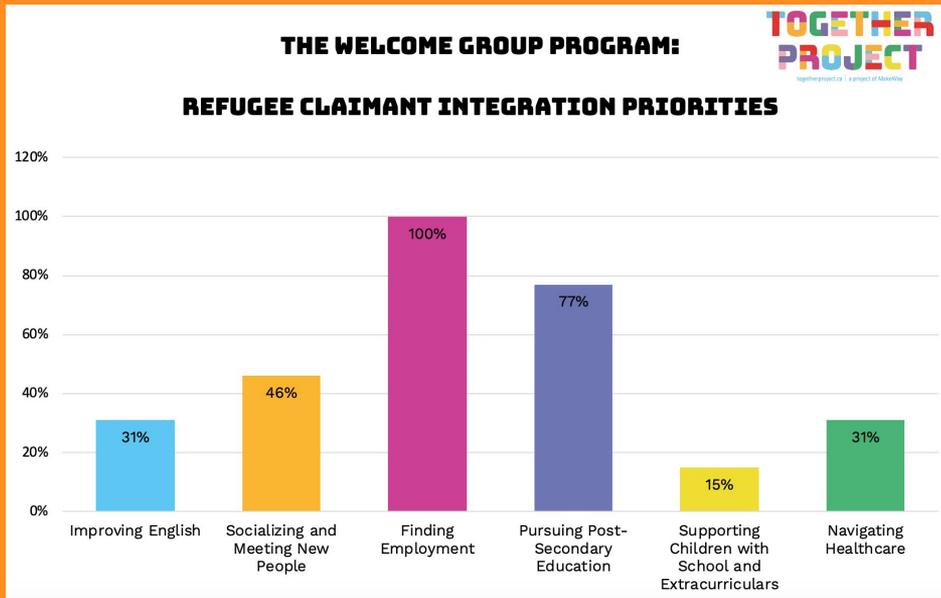
- Best way to build trust in a remote social support match is through weekly online meetings between newcomers and volunteers over the six-month match duration.
- Privacy concerns are important with digital interactions. Newcomers decide if they prefer phone, text or video and ideally at least two volunteers on a call.

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DEDICATED STAFF COACHING FOR VOLUNTEERS TO SUPPORT SPECIFIC NEWCOMER INTEGRATION PRIORITIES

HOW VOLUNTEERS CAN SUPPORT NEWCOMER CAREER NAVIGATION:

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1 RESUME BUILDING

Help newcomers develop a strong resume highlighting their experience and education.

2 TRAINING AND BRIDGING

Assist newcomers in find training or bridging programs they can take to strengthen their skills.

3 LANGUAGE LEARNING

Work with newcomers to develop their confidence in speaking English and review sector specific terms.

4 WORKERS' RIGHTS

Ensure newcomers understand their rights as an employee, such as sick days and maternity leave.

5 CHILDCARE

Help newcomers find affordable and safe childcare, including daycare and before and after school programs for their children.

6 NETWORKING

Connect newcomers to the appropriate networking opportunities for their field; leverage connections within volunteer social and employment networks.

- Employment emerged as a priority for refugee claimant matches so in the future, we hope to continue to build volunteer capacity to support refugee claimant employment. This could involve new agency or corporate partnerships or the creation of new volunteer resources.

- Greater agency flexibility in including RCs in career bridging programs.

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CENTERING REFUGEE CLAIMANT VOICES IN TOGETHER PROJECT PROGRAM DELIVERY & COMMUNICATIONS

Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

- Each match is based on a refugee claimant's unique integration priorities.
- Several refugee claimants have completed a six month match and opted to rejoin the program as volunteers
- Through our Together Project podcast, we have been able to share refugee claimant voices through anonymous storytelling.
- Refugee claimants bring a great deal of talent and good will to Canada.

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NGOZIE'S STORY

- Ngozie started our program as a refugee claimant participant and is now a protected person.
- She arrived in Canada from Nigeria with her three children.
- She speaks English fluently and has a background in banking.
- She was matched with a group of six women who she has connected with once or twice a week for six months.
- She is just starting a position with a major bank in Canada.
- She has just completed our volunteer training and will be matched with a new refugee claimant household in the coming weeks.

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SAM'S STORY - CBC METRO MORNING

Metro Morning with Ismaila Alfa

'It's so real! ...it's phenomenal!': Ugandan refugee and local volunteer meet in person for first time

▶ Play Segment   10:12   < Share Segment

Samuel Kimuli fled Uganda two years ago, survived the Toronto shelter system and COVID-19, and has found hope and support from a group called The Together Project. "It makes me humble": Kimuli talks about his journey and the strength he gets from volunteer Heejae Yang, as they meet face to face for the first time on an East York sidewalk.

Aired: Oct. 30, 2020

https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-39-metro-morning/clip/15806130-its-real-...its-phenomenal-ugandan-refugee-local-volunteer

- Sam started our program as a refugee claimant and is now a protected person.
- He arrived in Canada as a single youth from Uganda two years ago.
- We matched Sam with a group of university students.
- He was facing social isolation, housing and employment challenges, and COVID
- In this 2-part CBC Metro Morning episode, Sam explains how meeting the volunteers helped him.
- He is now in a Cloud Engineering Program at Google Canada.

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NEWCOMER FEEDBACK:

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

"I feel socially isolated in Toronto."

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Before Match	42%	16%	21%	5%	16%
After Match	5% 26%	16%	37%		16%

"I have people in Toronto who support me, such as close family, friends and community."

Before Match	5% 11%	21%	11%	42%	
After Match	16%	53%	5%	21%	5%

"I have someone in my life that I feel comfortable talking to about the problems I am facing."

Before Match	26%	11%	11%	16%	32%
After Match	42%	32%		11%	11%

"There are people in my life that rely on me for help and assistance."

Before Match	47%	16%	5%	11%	21%
After Match	63%		21%	11%	5%

"I have found people in Toronto who share my interests and enjoy the same social activites as me."

Before Match	5% 16%	5%	21%	42%	
After Match	26%	32%	16%	21%	5%

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REFUGEE CLAIMANT PILOT PROGRAM RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

- Welcome Groups for Refugee Claimants was funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- We used the Social Provisions Scale to track a change in newcomers' self-perception of social isolation.
- Despite the move to virtual volunteering the program results have been very positive.

BECOMING A VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER

STEP 1

Sign up to volunteer at togetherproject.ca

STEP 2

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VOLUNTEER WITH TOGETHER PROJECT

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WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

- 440 volunteers have signed up since the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020)

REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT:

VOLUNTEER AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

- 18-24 — 29%
- 25-34 — 42%
- 35-44 — 18%
- 45-54 — 7%
- 55-64 — 4%
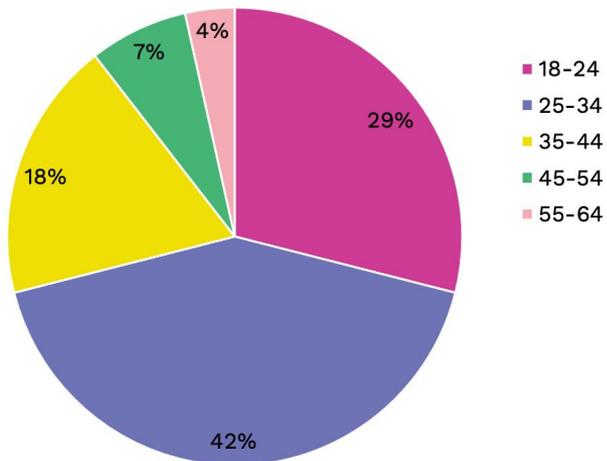
VOLUNTEER EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

Technology, Retired, Education, Public Sector, Social Work, Healthcare, Settlement, Student, Miscellaneous
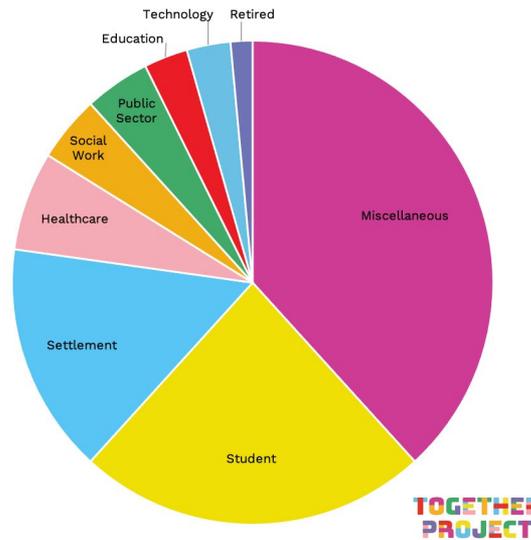
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WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

THE WELCOME GROUP:

VOLUNTEERS' BACKRGOUND

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Lived Experience as a Newcomer — 50%

Family History of Being New to Canada — 19%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%
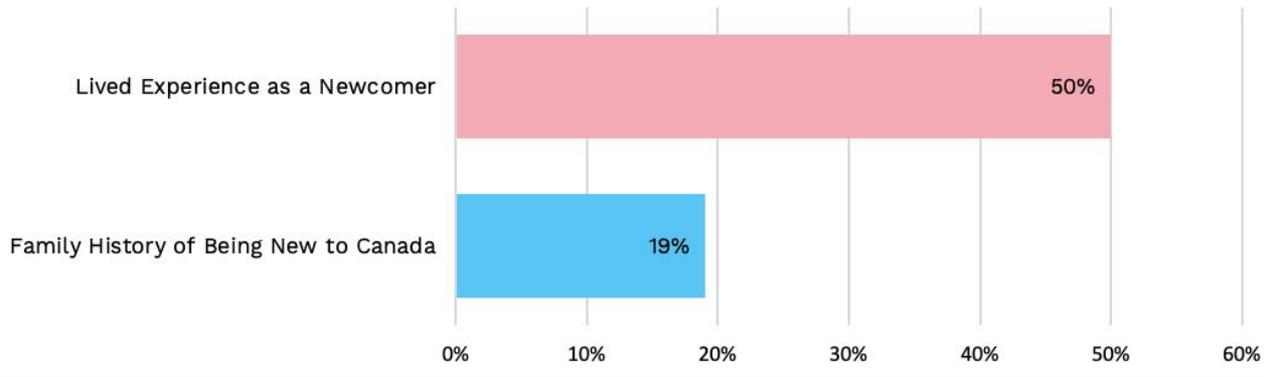
REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT

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PROVIDING REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT TO REFUGEE NEWCOMERS

Check in.

Volunteers can check in to see how newcomers are managing during this difficult time.

Socialize.

Social distancing can be quite isolating for everyone. Volunteers and newcomers can spend time getting to know each other virtually.

Help navigate virtual services.

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Answer questions.

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Practice English.

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Share resources.

Volunteers can help families find educational resources for their kids and things to keep busy, like online games or virtual museum visits.

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK: ADVANTAGES OF REMOTE SUPPORT

- Flexibility in terms of scheduling/availability

- Streamlined onboarding/training

- Emphasis on online tools and resources can keep some groups better organized (cloud software, shared calendars, etc.)

- In some cases, some newcomers report greater comfort with initiating connection remotely

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK: LIMITS OF REMOTE SUPPORT

- Video calls can be overwhelming/difficult to understand – easier doesn't mean better!

- Technological/internet challenges

- Difficulty feeling "connected", "unified", "comradery" without face-to-face interaction

- More limited range of support activities

- Language barrier is more significant

SUCCESS STORIES: PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

- https://vimeo.com/491875733

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR ONLINE VOLUNTEERING WITH A VULNERABLE POPULATION

1. Access to, and comfort with, technology
2. Low language barrier or available translation
3. Shared commitment to the program
4. Availability and reliability for building trust
5. Set reasonable expectations for goals and time commitment
6. Provide clear guidance but remain flexible
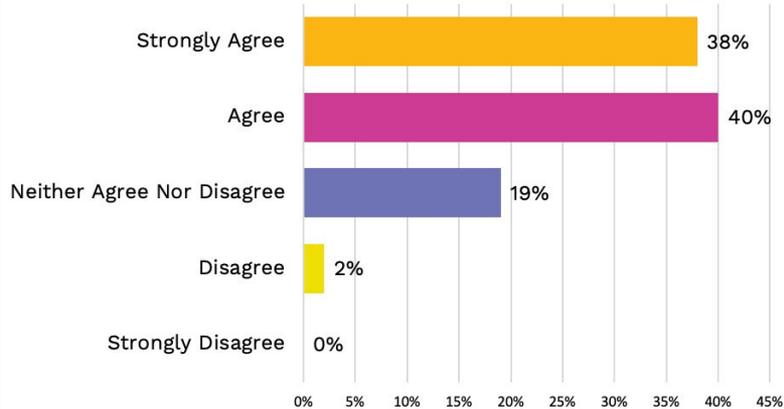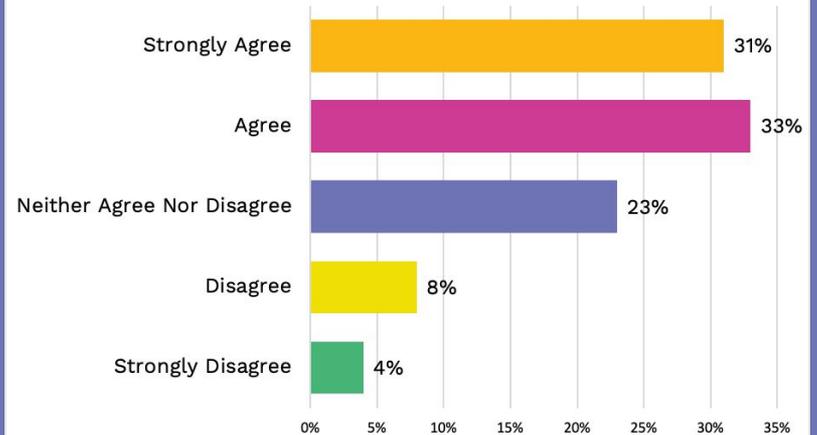
NEXT STEPS

- BLENDING GAR/REFUGEE CLAIMANT PROGRAMS

- SCALING THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM

- IMPACT AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

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THANK YOU!

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@together_hello

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