

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK SOUTH VANCOUVER MIGRANT WORKERS EMPOWERMENT CIRCLE

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
Vancouver, BC

Area of Practice:

Services and Supports for Vulnerable Immigrant Groups

Video:

<https://youtu.be/wdnH8xQaqn8>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

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PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

The South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH) was established in 1977 and is a community-based organization that focuses on connecting people and strengthening the neighbourhoods in South Vancouver. Its mandate is to develop harmonious relationships among community groups of different cultural, social, economic, and religious backgrounds. Programs and services are determined by the conditions within each community, and by the needs and interests of the people living in these communities. The SVNH currently offers a variety of programs and services that support individuals and families. Each year nearly 3,000 individuals participate in the programs, which are run in partnership with over 500 volunteers.

In Canada, temporary migration of foreign workers quadrupled between 2000 and 2019, with a small dip in 2015. British Columbia relies heavily on the temporary labour provided through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and receives approximately 20% of temporary foreign workers in Canada, the second largest percentage after Ontario. In fact, between January and December of 2019, there were 32,023 temporary foreign worker positions with a positive labour market impact assessment (LMIA) in British Columbia and 16,601 in Vancouver.

In 2018, the SVNH conducted a community survey about the needs of migrant workers. The survey found that migrant workers are often confronted with issues such as unpaid wages, illegal deductions on wages, demands for long work hours with few breaks, demands for performance of duties not agreed upon in contracts, inadequate provision of basic facilities, exposure to undue health and safety risks, inadequate living conditions, denial of medical care and other benefits, and control over and restriction of movement of workers and their communication with others.

Based on these findings and the observation that there was a lack of services and support available for migrant workers living and working in South Vancouver, the SVNH started the Migrant Workers Empowerment Circle (MWEC). The first phase of the MWEC program was launched in 2019 until 2020. After the success of the first phase, the SVNH launched a second phase in 2020 to 2021. The MWEC focuses on 1) building personal strengths, 2) connecting migrant workers to other migrant workers, 3) educating migrant workers on employment rights, laws and responsibilities, and 4) empowering migrant workers to use their voice.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

South Vancouver Migrant Workers Empowerment Circle

Description:

The Migrant Workers Empowerment Circle (MWEC) is a ground-breaking, innovative, holistic, and solution-based program that aims to address the needs of migrant workers by bridging the service delivery gap experienced by migrant workers. Migrant workers go through an initial assessment to identify their needs and are then referred to in-house programs and services and/or to partner organizations that address these needs. In terms of in-house programs, migrant workers are encouraged to participate in the components and activities of the MWEC. These include the Building

Blocks Program, the Restorative Justice Mental Wellness Program, the Mentorship Program, the Peer Navigators Network, and the Migrant Workers Food Distribution Day. The Building Blocks Program is typically attended by all migrant workers and is designed to provide information, facilitate the development of skills, offer opportunities for social interaction and cultural exchange, and provide access to technology. Access to technology is provided through the distribution of free computers and laptops. The other components and activities are attended by migrant workers depending on their needs. The Restorative Justice Mental Wellness Program is designed for migrant workers who experienced harm, need support in healing from trauma, seek conflict transformation, and/or are trying to understand and process change. The Mentorship program aims to support migrant workers in navigating the Canadian workplace environment as well as in cross-cultural communication and digital literacy. It also offers job search, resume and cover letter writing support. The Peer Navigators Network consists of volunteers who reach out to diverse migrant workers and their families, support the orientation process of the program, and provide language interpretation and tech support. Finally, the Migrant Workers Food Distribution Day is conducted in collaboration with two local churches to address food insecurity among migrant workers.

Goal(s):

The goal of the MWEC program is to empower migrant workers by providing them with the tools to build personal strength, by connecting them with other migrant workers, by educating them on employment rights, laws, and responsibilities, and by creating a space where they can use their voice.

Target Client Group(s):

The target client group consists of urban migrant workers from various industries.

Delivery Partners:

The MWEC program collaborated with the following partners: MOSAIC, Philippines Consulate, Mexican Consulate, Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, Spanish Church – Tabernaculo Biblico Batista El Redentor (Redeemer Baptist Church), Fraserview Library, WorkSafe BC, Employment Standard Branch, Salvation Army, Tenant Resource Advisory Centre, Migrant Workers Centre, Legal Services Society, Western Community College, and other SVNH programs.

Human Resources:

The MWEC program is delivered by five staff members and many volunteers. The staff include the program lead and four program facilitators (one for the Building Blocks Program, one for the Mentorship Program, one for the Restorative Justice Wellness Program and one for the Peer Navigators Network Program). One of the facilitators is also responsible for outreach to the Spanish community.

Funding:

The MWEC is funded through Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and a MOSAIC collaboration grant.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

The program is effective because it consists of several components and activities that address the various needs of migrant workers. The most common challenges that migrant workers and their families face are related to a) employment, income and benefits, b) prejudice, social exclusion and mental health, and c) limited access to resources (only a limited number of community agencies support migrant workers). The activities of the program address all of these challenges by providing employment and career support, mental wellness services, technology support, access to food and a place to socialize. In this way, the program is able to empower migrant workers, make them feel valued and respected, and gives them a sense of belonging. Importantly, the initial assessment directs migrant workers to those activities that are most relevant to their situation.

Efficient:

Several aspects of the program contribute to its efficiency. First, there is a strong emphasis on reducing logistical challenges that may hinder migrant workers from accessing the program. For example, the activities of the program are offered during times that are most likely to work for migrant workers such as evenings and weekends. Furthermore, the program distributes computers to migrant workers so that they can access the program activities remotely. Another feature of the program that contributes to its efficiency is that its volunteers serve multiple functions. Volunteers play an important role in the program's outreach and client uptake, and they also provide interpretation services and tech support to migrant workers.

Relevant:

The program activities are informed by community research that identified the challenges that migrant workers face and their needs. The program offers activities that address these needs.

Sustainable:

The first phase of the program surpassed the target number of migrant workers to be reached through the program. Initially, the program aimed to reach 200 migrant workers but ended up reaching 1810 migrant workers. After the success of the first phase of the program, the second phase was launched. Several factors have contributed to the success and sustainability of the program including a clear strategic vision, innovation, secure funding, partnerships, and a strong commitment by the project leadership.

Transferable:

The program could be transferred to agricultural migrant workers and other immigrants with temporary status in Canada, such as international students and refugee claimants. However, it is important that the unique challenges and needs of these groups are researched first. In this way, organizations can identify the type of supports that these groups need the most and adapt the program activities accordingly. Furthermore, the program's emphasis on digital inclusion and access to technology could be replicated by other organizations by developing a similar partnership with a local tech company to distribute refurbished computers for free.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The MWEC program is the first program in the South Vancouver area that seeks to support migrant workers in a holistic way. It is a solution-based model that addresses the various needs of migrant workers and addresses the service delivery gap experienced by migrant workers. Furthermore, the continuous evaluation of the program has been key to identifying what features of the program work well and what areas need improvement. For example, the results of an assessment showed that there was a strong need for English language acquisition and access to technology. As a result of these findings, the program has been expanded to address these needs. For example, the program has partnered with a local tech company to distribute refurbished computers to migrant workers for free.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

The principles that steer the program make it unique. The initial MWEC program was built on four principles: a) responsiveness to the community, b) focus on restorative justice practice, c) emphasis on inclusive backgrounds, and d) emphasis on partnerships and collaboration. In 2020, when the second phase of the MWEC program was launched, two additional principles were added. These include e) focus on English language acquisition and f) promote access to technology. These principles are strongly interrelated and are used to varying degrees in all Empowerment Circle activities.

High Client Uptake:

The volunteers in the Peer Navigators Network program facilitate client uptake. The volunteers reach out to their communities to spread the word and to attract migrant workers to join the program. This strategy is very successful because volunteers come from various communities and speak different languages. They also tend to be trusted by members of their communities, increasing the volunteers' ability to promote the program. In addition to the outreach activities conducted by the volunteers, the program also relies on the distribution of traditional marketing materials (e.g., a brochure in multiple languages that is distributed to various agencies, institutions, and local churches).

High Client Retention:

The program has high client retention. This is because the foundational principles of the program and its activities create a welcoming space for clients where their needs are met and they feel a sense of belonging. Also, the support that migrant workers give and receive from each other is an important reason for the high retention rate.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

Overall, the MWEC program has helped migrant workers to build personal strength by increasing confidence and mental wellness, to obtain employment related education and career support, and to meet with other migrant workers. In terms of the outcomes of the different subprograms, the results of the program evaluation found that the Restorative Justice Wellness Program provided a space of trust, compassion, safety and warmth for the participants to develop new and build on old relationships. It became a space of sharing past and present traumas. Through the Mentorship Program, participants learned job search and employment readiness strategies, learned resume and cover letter writing, practiced interview preparation, learned about cross-cultural communication, optimized digital literacy, and felt self-empowered. The evaluation results also showed that receiving a computer/laptop for free helped migrant workers, among other things, to learn about and attend other programs at the SVNH, connect with staff, make friends and break down isolation, and feel empowered and self-sufficient. Finally, the Migrant Workers Food Distribution Day helped migrant

workers to have regular access to food, increase their fruit and vegetable consumption, increase their healthy shopping and cooking habits, and made them feel good about themselves.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The program is evaluated internally through quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, surveys are sent to program participants, volunteers, and staff members. Program participants receive feedback surveys after each session they attend and once they complete a particular subprogram. In addition to these surveys, the SVNH also conducts regular focus groups and one-on-one interviews with participants and volunteers. So far, a total of 90 individuals were surveyed, 60 individuals participated in focus groups, and 30 individuals completed a one-on-one interview. Finally, the SVNH also relies on observational notes of the sessions written by staff members.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House: Website

www.southvan.org

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