



TOGETHER PROJECT

togetherproject.ca | a project of MakeWay

**VOLUNTEER
ENGAGEMENT
WITHIN THE
DIGITAL
SETTLEMENT
CONTEXT**

AGENDA

PART 1

Volunteering with Refugees and Refugee Claimants in the Digital Settlement Context – Anna Hill

PART 2

Centring Newcomer Voices in the Digital Settlement Context –
Natasha Comeau

PART 3

Building Refugee Newcomer Women's Digital Literacy in the Digital Settlement Context – Mirna El Sabbagh

PART 4

Where Do We Go From Here? Lessons Learned and Potential Pathways to Improved Integration Outcomes for Refugees –
Andrew Luszyk



TOGETHER PROJECT

togetherproject.ca | a project of MakeWay

**VOLUNTEERING WITH
REFUGEES AND REFUGEE
CLAIMANTS IN THE
DIGITAL SETTLEMENT
CONTEXT**

**ANNA HILL
TOGETHER PROJECT**

ABOUT US

Together Project makes change in three interconnected ways:

- building newcomer social connections
- supporting newcomer integration priorities
- amplifying community involvement in newcomer integration.



THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

Based in the GTA, the Welcome Group Program connects Government-Assisted Refugees, protected persons or refugee claimants to a “Welcome Group” of 4+ 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

THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE PROGRAM DELIVERY

WHAT ARE...
SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



togetherproject.ca

Social Bonds



Newcomers develop relationships with people within their own community.

Social Bridges

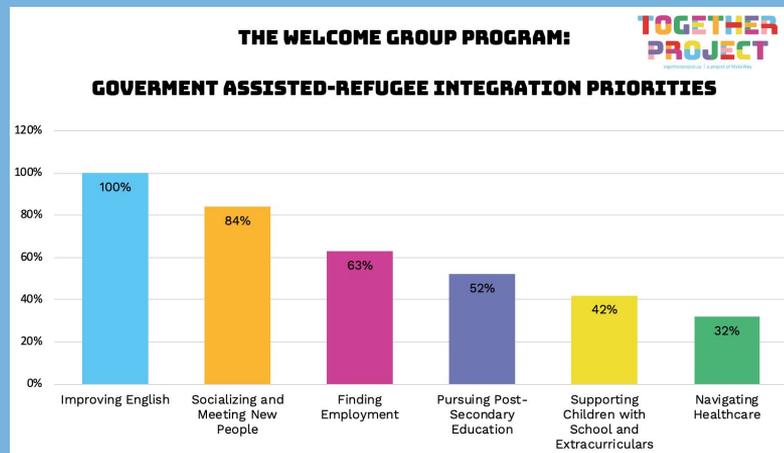


Newcomers develop relationships with members outside of their own community (i.e. Welcome Groups).

Social Links



Newcomers access community and social services and opportunities for engagement.



- Single women/mothers, single youth and LGBTQ+ newcomers face significant challenges with social isolation but especially in the wake of the pandemic.
- Newcomers without digital access and low English language levels face complex barriers in accessing online program delivery and services.

REMOTE SOCIAL SUPPORT - EXAMPLES

- Regular Zoom meetings with the parents of the family to practice English.
- Helping the eldest daughter build her resume, find job opportunities online and apply to them, and prepare for interview.
- Finding recreational/online activities for the kids, or helping them with their homework.
- Checking in with the family over WhatsApp to see how they're doing.

THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: REDEFINING THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

TOGETHER PROJECT

togetherproject.ca | a project of MakeWay

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.

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.



THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM: VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ONBOARDING

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



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



STEP 4

**VOLUNTEER WITH
TOGETHER
PROJECT**

www.togetherproject.ca | a project of Tides Canada



Meet your matched newcomer household on WhatsApp

STEP 5

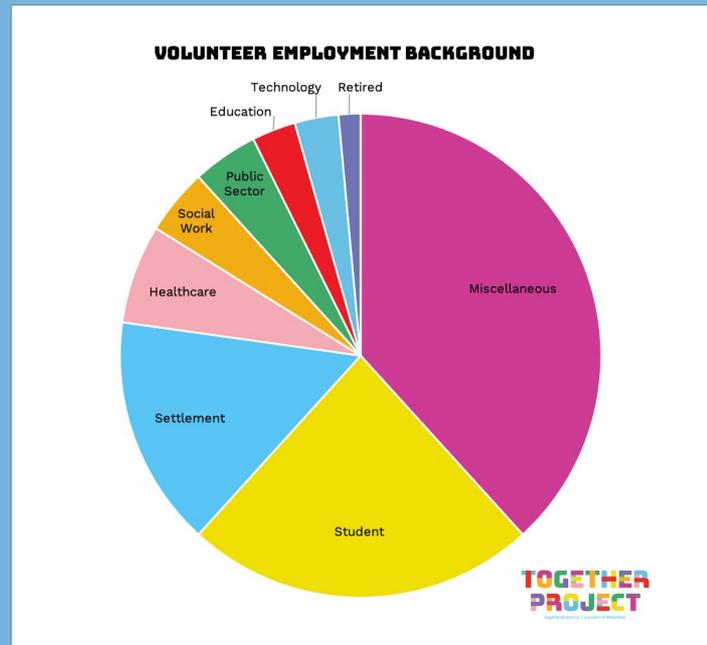
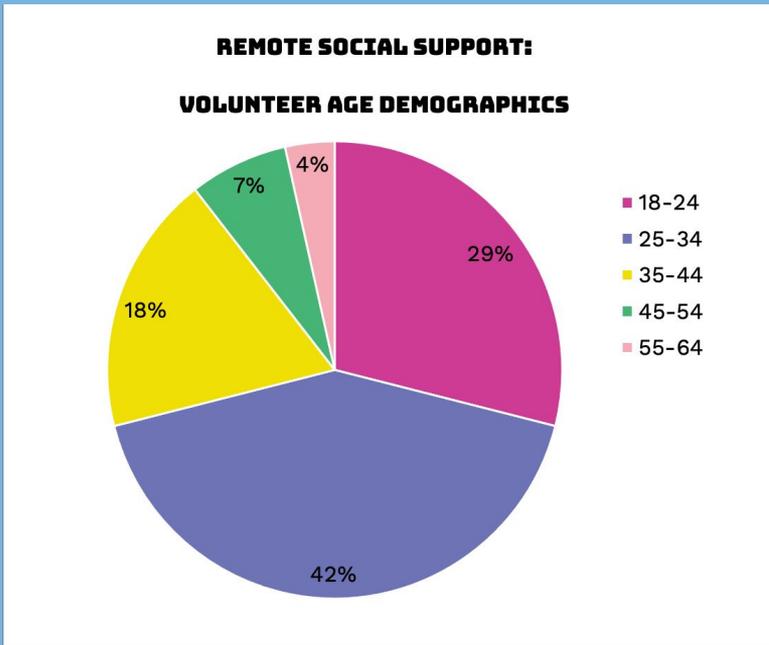
Get started supporting the newcomer household for the next six months



STEP 6

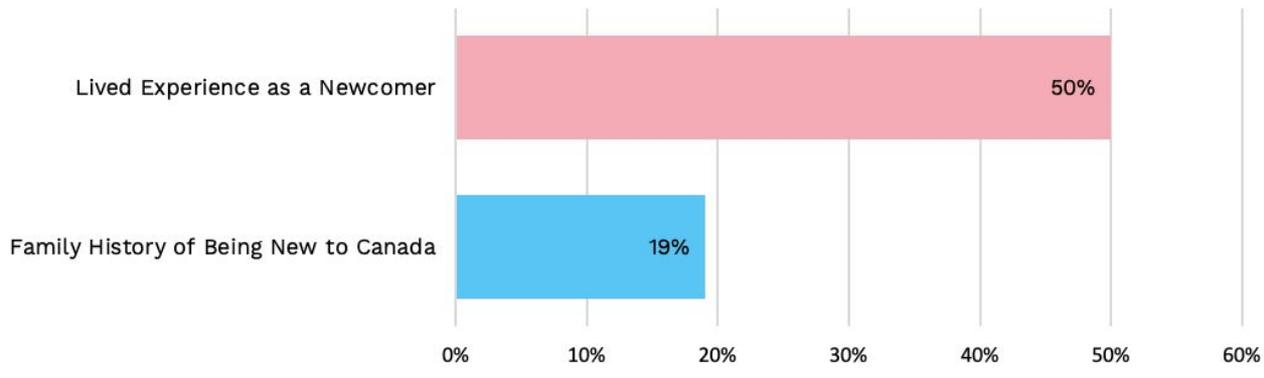
WHO ARE OUR VOLUNTEERS?

- ~500 volunteers have been matched with a newcomer household since the beginning of the pandemic.



WHO ARE OUR VOLUNTEERS?

THE WELCOME GROUP: VOLUNTEERS' BACKGROUND



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
- Geographic proximity of newcomers and volunteers is less critical.

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK: LIMITS OF REMOTE SUPPORT

- Newcomers (and volunteers) can face digital access challenges
- Difficulty feeling "connected", "unified", "comradery" without face-to-face interaction
- Two pronged challenge of building a connection with both the volunteers and the newcomers
- More limited range of support activities
- Language barrier is more significant

KEY LEARNING - VOLUNTEERING WITH REFUGEES AND REFUGEE CLAIMANTS IN THE DIGITAL SETTLEMENT CONTEXT

Remote social support can be effective for certain newcomer groups under specific circumstances i.e.

- Newcomers have access to digital devices, internet and opportunities to build their digital capacity
- Newcomers have access to interpretation
- Newcomers and volunteers have a shared commitment to the program and are able to build trust
- Volunteers receive targeted training and staff support