

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK #ITSTARTS

Simcoe County Local Immigration Partnership
Simcoe County, ON

Area of Practice:

Anti-Racism Dialogues and Initiatives

Video:

<https://youtu.be/pYY8b1-oUiE>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

February 2022

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

The Simcoe County Local Immigration Partnership (SCLIP) is a community partnership focused on the development of settlement strategies for newcomers. These strategies aim to bring together and support service delivery to newcomers in Simcoe County while promoting positive relationships, opportunity, and effective use of local resources. The SCLIP was established in 2011 and is funded, in part, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

The #ITSTARTS campaign was designed by a community stakeholder group (a cultural competency working group), as part of the SCLIP. The campaign was developed in response to one of the recommendations of the Simcoe County Community Settlement Strategy, published in 2012. In particular, the campaign addresses the recommendation to develop a public education strategy to reduce racism and discrimination and encourage cultural competency.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

#ITSTARTS

Description:

#ITSTARTS is a public awareness initiative developed by key community stakeholders and supported administratively by the SCLIP. #ITSTARTS was designed to develop momentum and encourage positive communication among residents with a goal of reducing racism and discrimination in Simcoe County. The campaign takes place annually in public spaces and on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) during the month of March. Since its launch in 2017, the initiative has evolved over time, with the development of ambassador and community champion roles.

Ambassadors are individuals who are passionate about equity, diversity, and inclusion and are willing to share messages of anti-racism within their sphere of influence (e.g., community of practice, friends, family and community connections). Prior to the start of the campaign, ambassadors are invited to an information session where they are provided with tools to help them start those conversations. During the year, they also have access to the Simcoe County Diversity Hub, which is an online community of practice that offers resources and the opportunity for continuous engagement.

Community champions are organizations that are willing to take a leadership role for a minimum of one week of the month-long campaign. This includes planning activities/events in their organization, and sharing daily social media messages with their followers.

Goal(s):

The campaign is designed to encourage local residents to talk about racism and discrimination, and to encourage learning and relearning of practices that encourage equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Target Client Group(s):

Residents of Simcoe County

Delivery Partners:

The 2021 Community Champions included:

- Barrie Police Services
- Barrie Public Library
- Catulpa Community Services
- Conseil Scolaire Catholique Mon Avenir
- Georgian College
- Lakehead University
- Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)
- Simcoe County District School Board
- Simcoe Muskoka Catholic School Board
- Simcoe County Library Cooperative
- South Simcoe Police
- United Way of Simcoe-Muskoka
- YMCA of Simcoe-Muskoka

Human Resources:

The campaign is administered by the manager, coordinator and administrative assistant of the SCLIP. In addition, the campaign has received internal in-kind support from Service Simcoe with media releases, social media and graphic design. The campaign has also benefitted from external in-kind support from the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB). In particular, the SCDSB helped develop materials for the ambassador information sessions and has also co-facilitated the information sessions. Finally, community champions assume key roles in the campaign by promoting the campaign on social media and in their public spaces, such as libraries, schools, and post-secondary institutions.

Funding:

The human resources costs are covered primarily by LIP funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and municipal contributions from the County of Simcoe. Municipal funding from the County of Simcoe generally covers campaign resources (printing, signage, resource materials).

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

A key aspect that contributes to the campaign's effectiveness is its reliance on community partnerships. In the third year of the campaign, the role of community champions was established. Community champions are organizations from various sectors that agree annually to help plan the campaign (attend planning meetings, offer support for community events) and take a leadership role for one week of the month-long campaign. The one-week commitment is manageable, and ensures momentum throughout the month-long campaign. Due to their large size, community champions have the infrastructure and expertise to support the social media aspects of the campaign. In fact,

the strong social media channels of the community champions have accelerated the social media outcomes. Besides this, the campaign takes place every March and highlights March 21st, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Efficient:

Many of the campaign resources are enhanced each year building on previously used resources, and the repository of learning materials is augmented annually. For example, in the first year of the campaign, participation cards were designed, printed, and distributed through public libraries, elementary and secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions. Also, a section of the County of Simcoe website was dedicated to campaign and learning materials. In the second year, the campaign cards were translated into multiple languages. In the third year, selfie frames were introduced and distributed to ambassadors and community champions. In 2021, the Simcoe County Diversity Hub was introduced to engage ambassadors year-round. Overall, material costs are low, contributing to the efficiency of the campaign.

Another factor contributing to the efficiency of the campaign is that the SCLIP has been operating for 10 years and has established strong partnerships with several organizations in the community, including the education sector and police services.

Relevant:

The need to address racism and discrimination has increased in recent years. For example, according to Statistics Canada, in 2019, approximately 2,000 hate crimes were reported by police in Canada, a significant increase from approximately 1,200 police reported hate crimes in 2013 (Moreau, 2021). Furthermore, the anonymous nature of online platforms has created an environment that can nurture destructive dialogue. Given this context, it is important to engage in initiatives that aim to promote positive conversations and reduce racism and discrimination.

Sustainable:

The campaign is low cost and has high impact. It relies primarily on the contributions of community champions. Since the inception of the community champions role, the number of community organizations participating has increased with very little attrition. Annually, the SCLIP encourages new organizations to become community champions, increasing the reach of the campaign. Finally, the introduction of the Simcoe County Diversity Hub encourages year-round engagement of ambassadors.

Transferable:

To date, the campaign has primarily engaged stakeholders in the broader public sector. Active community champions include school boards, post-secondary institutions, police, libraries, United Way, and not-for-profit community organizations. Given that these agencies exist in most communities, the campaign is likely highly transferable to other communities. Furthermore, to successfully transfer the campaign, it is also important to establish the role of a central coordinator as well as to provide access to virtual tools and facilitator training.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The #ITSTARTS campaign is relatively simple. The uniqueness of the campaign lies with the engagement of a variety of community stakeholders willing to publicly support an anti-racism, anti-

discrimination initiative. The development of ambassador and community champion roles has facilitated the growth of #ITSTARTS in Simcoe County. Also, a unique feature of the ambassador role is that it is designed to be flexible to the individual's expertise and comfort level. In other words, it is up to the ambassadors how they want to engage with the campaign in their own spheres of influence.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

The leadership for this initiative resides in an upper tier municipality, the County of Simcoe. This provides a unique connection to the 16 member municipalities and the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia. The campaign length remains manageable at one month, and is sustained through one-week commitments by community champions. Organizations' commitment to attend meetings and follow through with campaign objectives lasts about four months annually, from November to March. The sentiments of the campaigns are sustained year-round by continuing to engage ambassadors and other community stakeholders through resources, information, and learning activities offered through the Simcoe County Diversity Hub.

High Client Uptake:

Since the inception of the ambassador and community champions roles, the campaign has been able to attract new ambassadors and community champions every year. Since 2018, over 350 ambassadors have attended information sessions to learn how to implement the initiative in their community of practice. Prior to the pandemic, sessions were hosted in different communities across Simcoe County and ambassadors were provided with a binder and USB stick with information resources. In 2021, eleven information sessions were hosted online, and all resources and tools were made available electronically.

High Client Retention:

Since the inception of the community champions role, the number of community organizations participating has increased with very little attrition. Similarly, every year, 90% or more of the ambassadors who participated in an information session implemented the campaign in the month of March.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

The campaign growth on social media illustrates the public's interest in the campaign. In the first year of the campaign, the social media reach on Facebook and Twitter was 1.5 million users. In the fifth year of the campaign, the social media reach on Facebook and Twitter increased to 5.1 million users. In other words, over 5 years the social media reach increased by over 300%.

Starting in 2020, the SCLIP also used meltwater reports to assess negative sentiment. Meltwater reports provide information on social media reach and engagement. The meltwater reports used by the SCLIP track the campaign's performance on Twitter and Facebook. Based on these reports, the SCLIP found that, in 2020, negative sentiment for the campaign was 16%. In 2021, negative sentiment was reduced to 9%.

The engagement of ambassadors in the campaign further illustrates the success of #ITSTARTS. The number of ambassadors has grown every year. In 2021, over 100 individuals attended the ambassador information sessions. Ninety percent of these ambassadors positively evaluated the information sessions and implemented the campaign in their community of practice during the

month of March. They engaged their colleagues, peers, family and friends in conversations that addressed racism and discrimination.

In terms of the Simcoe County Diversity Hub, the SCLIP found that during the month of March in 2021, 275 individuals accessed the online community. In total, there were 4632 pageviews, of which almost 2500 were unique.

Finally, the number of community champions and the events hosted by them has increased every year.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The SCLIP uses a number of tools to evaluate the impact and value of the campaign on a yearly basis.

Ambassadors

The SCLIP tracks the number of ambassador information sessions, the number of participants, and the participants' engagement in the campaign. Ambassadors are provided with an opportunity to evaluate information sessions. Information is collected on role clarity, the value of the information learned, and suggestions for future learning.

Community Champions

The SCLIP tracks the number of community champions, with a goal of recruiting four new additional champions annually (one for each week of the month-long campaign).

Social Media

The SCLIP tracks the impact of the social media campaign using meltwater reports. As mentioned above, meltwater reports provide information on social media reach and engagement. The meltwater reports used by the SCLIP track the campaign's performance on Twitter and Facebook.

Campaign Depth

The SCLIP has been concerned that the campaign could lead to tokenism. For this reason, LIP staff peruse the campaign activity, reviewing content for indicators of campaign depth. Annually, the campaign has noted a deepening of content, including the level of educational information shared, and organizations' commitments to address racism and discrimination.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

County of Simcoe:

<https://www.simcoe.ca/>

#ITSTARTS:

<https://www.simcoe.ca/dpt/ccs/lip/itstarts>

2021 #ITSTARTS Campaign Outcomes:

<https://simcoe.civicweb.net/document/94262>