

# SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK EAST COAST KITCHEN PARTIES PROJECT FOR AND BY 2SLGBTQIA+ NEWCOMERS

Centre for Immigrant Programs, YMCA of Greater Halifax and  
Dartmouth  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

## Area of Practice:

Promoting Physical and Mental Health

## Video:

<https://youtu.be/K0IG3djrazA>

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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The YMCA of Greater Halifax and Dartmouth is a charitable, non-profit organization dedicated to enriching local communities with an array of services. Program offerings are grouped into five categories: Children's Programs, Youth Programs, Newcomer Programs, Adult Programs and Older Adult Programs. Within the framework of the YMCA's commitment to inclusivity, the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs provides comprehensive, community-based support to newcomer children, youth, and their families.

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project for and by 2SLGBTQIA+ Newcomers, nestled within the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, seeks to address the unique challenges faced by young 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers in Canada. 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers encounter social and physical isolation upon arrival, coupled with discrimination within their own ethnic communities. While they do have access to various services and supports as newcomers, they often lack 2SLGBTQIA+ specific spaces to forge relationships and establish supportive social networks.

Taking inspiration from the Maritimes' tradition of Kitchen Parties or ceilidhs, the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project is specifically designed to cater to 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers, providing them with a platform for socializing, sharing food, stories, and music. This initiative aims to foster a sense of belonging and community development. After the program's initial inception, the Kitchen Parties served as a springboard for the development of additional activities to further strengthen the sense of community.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM**

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**Name:**

East Coast Kitchen Parties Project for and by 2SLGBTQIA+ Newcomers

**Description:**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project for and by 2SLGBTQIA+ Newcomers has four components: 1) kitchen parties and mental health discussions, 2) a home gardening workshop, 3) the production of an animated film about uninformed or unhealthy eating habits, and 4) the development of a project article. The first two components are focused on fostering a sense of community and advancing the physical and mental well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers. The third and fourth components are focused on knowledge mobilization.

1. **Kitchen Parties and Mental Health Discussions:** The Kitchen Parties consist of six interactive sessions, each accommodating 6 to 8 participants. These gatherings are designed to be a comprehensive experience, lasting up to four hours. Participants take turns choosing a dish from their culture to teach the other participants. During each session, they start with an engaging culinary demonstration led by a participant who acts as the chef in charge for the session by preparing the menu and guiding others to make the dish together. A program coordinator assists in acquiring groceries prior to each session and ensures that each session runs smoothly. Each participant is encouraged to interact with the other participants at dedicated food preparation workstations to foster new relations and to learn how to prepare

the new dish. During these sessions, participants also learn about the nutritional value of the food they are preparing.

After each culinary session, a facilitated discussion takes place in collaboration with a health promoter from Nova Scotia Health's Mental Health and Addictions Health Promotion team. These discussions explore essential themes such as physical and social isolation, connectedness, food security, and the myths and stigmas surrounding mental health discussions. Participants share their experiences and ideas with each other through activities such as brainstorming and grounding exercises to enhance their physical and mental well-being. Given the sensitive nature of these topics, project facilitators are skilled in guiding these discussions, clarifying that while these are not peer support groups, they are supportive and safe environments. To aid participants, resources such as counseling services are provided. In addition, to ensure that language is not a barrier to participation, interpreters are available to assist all participants. Interpreters are briefed before and after each session so that all aspects of the session are aligned with the project's trauma-responsive approach.

2. **Home Gardening Workshop:** The home gardening workshop teaches participants practical knowledge about sustainable planting and food sourcing in the Canadian climate. The project helps participants identify and cultivate seasonal plants for nourishment. Participants gain hands-on experience in planting herbs and vegetables (e.g., garlic and spinach), emphasizing self-sufficiency and resilience.
3. **Animated Film:** The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project partnered with the Wicked Bodies Project developed by Dr. Philip Joy and Truefaux Films Inc. to produce an animated film to increase awareness about the complex relationships between uninformed or unhealthy eating habits and identities, particularly those of racialized individuals, immigrants, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, for healthcare service providers. This partnership aims to create a platform for participants to engage as co-researchers, contributing their insights to the unique challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers related to diet and health.

Participation in the animated film's creation is voluntary, with the option for participants to withdraw at any point. The Kitchen Parties attendees who agree to participate are interviewed to gather information that will shape the film's script. Interviewees have the chance to review the audio files before the final version of the film is produced. The film is animated to ensure anonymity.

Prior to the interviews, participants are welcome to ask the filmmakers any questions they may have about the animated film, its societal impact, and the interview process itself. In addition, participants are part of brainstorming sessions where they can collaborate to decide on the specific topics to be covered in the film. In focus groups, participants discuss collective experiences to inform the film's audio, script, and images. Active participation of the interviewees during all stages fosters transparency in the knowledge-making process and builds trust by addressing power differences between service providers and recipients. The animated film will be available online upon its completion later in 2024.

4. **Article:** To ensure the program's lasting impact, the project collaborators have created a comprehensive article to document learnings from all facets of the project. It provides valuable guidance for other organizations interested in adopting a similar approach, making it easier to transfer knowledge and empower diverse communities across Canada. The article will be available online upon its completion later in 2024.

**Goal(s):**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project's primary goal is to facilitate connections among 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers by providing a space for discussions about their mental health, settlement needs, and identity, and how these aspects intersect with their lived experiences. The focus is on reducing social isolation and fostering a sense of community by creating opportunities to connect and share experiences.

In addition, the project seeks to reduce the stigma associated with mental health discussions and illness, particularly among 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers who face an increased risk of developing unhealthy or unformed eating habits and eating disorders as they adjust to their new life in Canada. As a result, another goal of the project is to enhance participants' understanding of nutrition and promote both their physical and mental well-being.

**Target Client Group(s):**

Target clients include 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers aged 19 and above with varying immigration backgrounds and lengths of time in Canada, who share an interest in connecting with other 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers.

**Delivery Partners:**

YMCA Canada, YMCA Greater Halifax/Dartmouth's Immigrant Services, The Mental Health and Addictions Promotion Team at Nova Scotia Health (Central Zone), Dr. Phillip Joy, Department of Applied Human Nutrition, Mount Saint Vincent University, and Truefaux Film Inc.

**Human Resources:**

The program is administered by the Newcomer 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth Program coordinator at the YMCA of Greater Halifax and Dartmouth, a health promoter, assisted by several language interpreters, and a researcher and filmmakers from the Wicked Bodies Project.

**Funding:**

This program is funded by the YMCA Canada Innovation Fund grant.

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

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**Effective:**

Several factors contribute to the success of the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project:

- The project relies on a continuous feedback process with its participants. Project organizers gather and use the feedback and suggestions provided by participants after each Kitchen Party session to improve the efficiency and impact of the next one. The evaluation process

demonstrates the project's dedication to reflexivity, adjusting its implementation techniques and discussion topics over time.

- The Kitchen Party sessions revolve around food; a common thread connecting people of various backgrounds.
- The project equips interpreters with inclusive interpretation techniques such as using gender-neutral language to improve communication and create a respectful atmosphere.
- Most of the project organizers are newcomers, immigrants, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, who inform the project's guiding framework and values, enhancing its effectiveness.
- Transparency is a key aspect of the project's effectiveness. Participants are involved in decision-making, and organizers openly share the project's objectives and methods. This approach builds trust as participants gain a sense of control over their participation and experiences.
- By including newcomers from various immigration backgrounds, the project creates an opportunity for 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers to interact across potentially very different experiences and to connect and learn from each other.
- The project is also effective in how it leverages knowledge. As an educational tool and an advocacy resource, the animated film not only raises awareness about the challenges related to uninformed or unhealthy eating habits among 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers, but also serves as a lasting record of the project's impact. Furthermore, it can be used to encourage community unity and involvement over time.

**Efficient:**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project's specific focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers contributes to its efficiency. The targeted approach allows for a more streamlined and precise understanding of the specific needs within this niche community. Furthermore, the project's efficiency extends to its partner selection process, which identifies partners with a wide range of strengths and skills. In this way, the program is able to meet the diverse and distinct needs of its clients in an efficient way.

**Relevant:**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project is relevant because it fills a gap in services available to newcomers from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community who may not want to reveal their gender or sexual orientation when accessing conventional settlement services. Furthermore, the project's targeted approach to address the lack of knowledge on interactions between food habits, migration experiences, and gender and sexual diversity, demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the community's strengths and challenges. Participants are taught to identify nutritionally dense food offering the best nutritional value for the cost of the food. By applying an equity lens to instill practical skills through discussions and activities on nutrition and mental health, the project is likely to have a lasting impact and remain relevant.

**Sustainable:**

Several aspects of the program contribute to its sustainability. The collaboration between the Newcomer 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth Program, Nova Scotia Health's Mental Health and Addictions Promotion team, and Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) establishes a solid foundation that draws upon expertise from various sectors. This multidisciplinary approach not only guarantees a

holistic grasp of mental health, nutrition, and 2SLGBTQIA+ issues but also creates opportunities for ongoing cooperation, resource sharing, and continuous improvement.

**Transferable:**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project's initial design prioritized equity, with a specific focus on supporting the most isolated individuals, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This foundation makes it adaptable to other groups who may not have the chance to participate in the broader community or share their unique experiences.

The project could be replicated in rural areas. However, in smaller populations, it would be important to create safe spaces, especially for participants who require greater privacy. One way to accomplish this could be to schedule sessions during low service-traffic times.

To successfully replicate this project, it is important that program administrators are able to engage in effective communication and to adapt when needed. This is because the project is designed to continuously adjust to the unique needs of its clients. Other essential skills include facilitation skills, supported by a strong understanding of immigration, familiarity with mental health terminology, and the ability to promote culturally sensitive conversations including respectful gender and sexually diverse language. Finally, it is recommended that organizations also collaborate to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to incorporate diverse perspectives and expertise into the program.

**Innovative and Forward Thinking:**

The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project is innovative and forward-thinking because it strongly emphasizes participant involvement and inclusivity. It places participants at the forefront of every aspect of the project, allowing their input to shape the discussions. By prioritizing the perspectives of participants, the project moves beyond traditional approaches and ensures that the interventions directly address their needs, priorities, and lived experiences.

Furthermore, the project's emphasis on linguistic inclusivity is a clear reflection of its forward-thinking approach. Recognizing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of participants, the project includes interpretation services to ensure smooth discussions and enhance equity by removing barriers such as binary gender language, thereby amplifying underrepresented voices. The program's interpretation approach sets a new standard for inclusivity by tailoring interpretations to respect the unique linguistic experiences and needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers.

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

Unlike traditional project designs, the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project blends cultural heritage with community building to address the challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers. By embracing the Maritime provinces' Kitchen Parties tradition, the program builds upon communal wisdom and practices that foster well-being, belonging, and resilience, cultivating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers. It also addresses challenges such as food insecurity by providing a home gardening workshop, promoting independent, sustainable living and bolstering participants' agency through knowledge while simultaneously encouraging a sense of community. In addition, the program's gender-sensitive interpretation adds to its uniqueness. By conducting pre- and post-session briefings with interpreters, the project sensitizes them to various gender identities and sexual orientations

from diverse backgrounds, underscoring the project's commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness to diverse needs.

#### **High Client Uptake and Retention:**

Given the highly interactive, fast-paced, and dynamic nature of the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project's cooking and mental well-being discussion sessions, a group size of 6-8 individuals per session has proven to be the ideal number. This ensures the delivery of efficient and impactful sessions. High client uptake and retention is demonstrated by a consistent engagement rate across all sessions, with full capacity at each meeting and a cohort effect of learning and evolving together observed when the same individuals attend the sessions. The registration for the home gardening workshop reached its maximum with 12 attendees, leading to the creation of a waitlist in case of cancellations. Six participants chose to participate in the making of the animated film, which extended its length from the initially planned 5 minutes to 16 minutes.

#### **Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:**

Participants reported several positive outcomes from the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project. Participants shared that they had a greater understanding of the structural barriers to their participation in a social setting and learned skills to navigate these barriers confidently. They also had increased awareness of available settlement resources, an expanded repertoire of cooking skills, enhanced knowledge of nutrition – including its benefits and cost-effectiveness – and gained experience in plant cultivation within the Canadian context. Participants also gained a deeper understanding of mental health, food literacy to overcome unhealthy eating habits, their own food culture, and connected with individuals from various cultural and immigration backgrounds. By actively engaging in all components of the East Coast Kitchen Parties Project, including sharing their experiences through the animated film, participants gained confidence and a sense of agency that extended to other aspects of their lives.

## **PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY**

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The East Coast Kitchen Parties Project assesses its effectiveness and alignment with clients' needs in three ways. First, it collects participant feedback, both informally and formally, through post-session surveys for the kitchen parties, the animated film, and the home gardening workshop. The feedback component is built into the agenda of each session to ensure a good response rate. This ongoing feedback loop provides insights into the participant experience, allowing for immediate adjustments in the subsequent sessions.

Second, the program encourages reflective discussions among administrators across all partnerships at the end of each session. During these discussions, they compare the strengths and weaknesses of the latest session to previous ones and examine the effectiveness of introduced interventions. This process helps refine the engagement strategy for the next session.

Finally, the program tracks participant retention across all components of the project and identifies themes that predict participant attrition and retention. The project also documents participant engagement and interaction during each session. Together with the feedback provided by

participants and project administrators, the project measures and evaluates the achievement of immediate and intermediate outcomes.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth**

<https://www.yishfx.ca>