



REPORT: RRLIP COMMUNITY FORUM 2023-2024

Forum Date:	Forum Title:	Report Prepared by:
Feb. 27, 2024	Supporting the Mental and Emotional Wellness of Past/Recent Newcomers in Regina, SK	RRLIP Staff

PURPOSE OF FORUM

Each year, the **Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP)** hosts a community forum. The purpose of this event is to provide RRLIP Project updates and to bring together and engage community members and stakeholders to discuss barriers and challenges around a particular aspect of newcomer settlement and integration, as well as to identify solutions to these barriers and challenges.

The 2023-24 forum topic was determined through consultation with local newcomer community members, through the [RRLIP's 2022 Newcomer Survey](#), which indicated that mental and emotional wellness has become a greater challenge to local settlement and integration than was indicated by previous RRLIP research.

Goals of the forum were to:

- Learn from experiences of past/recent newcomers and those who work to support them in the area of mental and emotional wellness
- Understand the barriers and challenges to past/recent newcomers' mental and emotional wellness, particularly in Regina
- Share information about tools and resources available to support past/recent newcomers' mental and emotional wellness

PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF FORUM

In the months of planning that went into this community forum, RRLIP consulted with members of its **Mental and Emotional Wellness Working Group (MEWWG)**, which was initially convened in November 2021. This working group is made up of individual community members and representatives from agencies and organizations that work to support the mental and emotional wellness of past/recent newcomers in Regina, SK.

Examples of MEWWG members include:

- Family Service Regina (FSR)
- International Women of Saskatoon (IWS)
- Regina Immigrant Women Centre (RIWC)
- Regina Open Door Society (RODS) - Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) and Community Connections staff
- Rooted Connections (formerly CFS Regina)
- Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Schizophrenia Society of SK (SSS)
- SK Ministry of Social Services
- University of Regina Online Therapy Unit

During the period of planning for this Community Forum, representatives from the Regina office of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) were also on the MEWWG table, but at the time of the event, there was no CMHA representative on the MEWWG, due to their current staff capacity.

Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (SAISIA) staff also provided support to RRLIP staff in hosting this forum.

WHO ATTENDED?

Of 61 registrants (not including RRLIP or SAISIA staff), 34 participants (including four RRLIP and SAISIA staff) attended this virtual event. Organizations and agencies represented among attendees were:

- Age Friendly Regina
- City of Regina
- Connecting Grids Regional Immigration Partnership
- Government of SK Ministry of Social Services
- Child Protection
- Extended Family Support
- Service Delivery
- Ranch Ehrlo
- Regina Fire and Protective Services (RFPS)
- Regina Immigrant Women Centre (RIWC)
- Regina Open Door Society (RODS)
- Regina Police Service (RPS)
- Regina Public Schools
- Regina Qu'appelle Health Region (RQHR)
- Regina Work Prep Centre (RWPC)
- Rooted Connections (formerly CFS Regina)
- RRLIP Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT) members
- Salvation Army – Gemma House, Waterston Mission
- Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA)
- Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Services d'accueil et d'inclusion francophone de la Saskatchewan (SAIF-SK)
- SK Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA)
- SK NDP MLAs and staff
- SK Safety Council (SSC)
- Sexual Assault Services of SK (SASS)
- University of Saskatchewan
- Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre
- SK Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)
- Ukrainian Canadian Congress – SK (UCC-SK)
- Welcoming the Newcomer Ministry (Our Saviour's Lutheran Church)

Among attendees of this event, there were also several other individual community members (e.g. local church volunteers, a mental health counselor, an art therapist, and other individuals) with an interest in this topic.

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

The Forum Agenda included:

- **Introduction:** Welcome and Land Acknowledgement; Introductions of RRLIP Staff; Purpose of Forum
- **RRLIP Updates:** Highlights of Activities in 2023-24 Fiscal Year
- **Initial Results of 2023-24 MEW Survey** (PowerPoint Presentation, Q&A)
- **Audience Poll**
- **Panel Discussion**
- **Wrap-up:** Thank you; Reminder of Resources on RRLIP website
(Note: related resources, event evaluation mini-survey, etc. were emailed to registrants after the event.)

Details of the forum program included:

1. **Introduction** of the new RRLIP Project Manager – Mussarat Parveen – and Assistant Manager – Sonika Chaudhary
2. **Updates on RRLIP activities** in the 2023-24 fiscal year, aligned with the key priorities from the [2022-24 RRLIP Community Plan](#) (formerly Action Plan). Examples include:
 - **Employment:**
 - Ongoing meetings of the Labour Market Working Group (LMWG)
 - Newcomer Employment Readiness Week event (Oct. 2023)
 - #ImmigrantsWork (#IW) initiative, in partnership with World Education Services (WES) and local partners including the City of Regina, Regina & District Chamber of Commerce, and settlement, employment, and education service providing agencies.
 - **Housing:**
 - Ongoing meetings of the Canadian Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC)
 - Special CHAC meeting (Nov 2023) with Mayor Masters and the City of Regina's Director of Indigenous Relations, Audra Young, which focused on newcomers' local housing challenges and support opportunities
 - Input into training module for rental housing providers on renting to newcomers
 - Connecting to education and training programs for tenants
 - **Cultural Bridging (Anti-Racism/Discrimination):**
 - Ongoing meetings of the Anti-Racism/Discrimination Working Group (AR/DWG)
 - Hosted a **film screening of the film *The Newcomers***, which highlighted experiences of newcomers settling in smaller centers in Saskatchewan, in partnership with community organizations such as the RPL and the Regina German Film Club

- **Mental and Emotional Wellness (MEW):**
 - Ongoing meetings of the Mental and Emotional Wellness Working Group (MEWWG).
 - Coordination of the Community Forum described in this Report.

- **Social Connections:**

The Social Connections priority currently does not have a designated working group in place to support it. Instead, this priority is addressed by providing support and partnership to other community stakeholders, whenever possible. RRLIP promotes existing cultural and cross-cultural connection events in the project blog, Facebook page, in RRLIP-convened meetings, community partner meetings, etc.

- **Other activities supporting (re)settlement:**
 - regular meetings of the **Local/Regina Settlement Response Group** – local settlement sector agencies and provincial settlement support agencies that meet to coordinate their responses around all newcomer arrivals to Regina. In recent months, this group’s discussions have expanded to include new areas of challenge: responding to Refugee Claimants/Human Trafficking, and Food Insecurity.
 - As a result of the above discussions and input from other agencies, RRLIP has convened a new working group on Refugee Claimants/Human Trafficking (RC/HTWG) and are in the process of convening a new working group on Food Insecurity.
 - Facilitated two local stakeholder consultations on human trafficking and housing/shelter on behalf of the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (CCTEHT).
 - For some years, the RRLIP has facilitated a **Local (Regina) Private Sponsorship Group** and also supports the RSTP (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program) in hosting the **SK Private Sponsorship of Refugees Network**.

All RRLIP working groups meet approximately 4 to 6 times a year.

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- 3. **Initial results of the 2023-24 Survey on Mental and Emotional Wellness Supports for Past/Recent Newcomers in Regina:** Survey responses were collected between June 2023 and February 19, 2024. The survey focused on mental and emotional wellness support for past/recent newcomers in Regina. 303 individuals responded, all of whom were born outside of Canada, currently living in Regina, and aged at least 15 years old. At this Community Forum, the initial survey results were shared by PowerPoint. The full [Survey Report](#) is available on the RRLIP website.

4. Audience poll: attendees shared their experiences of mental and emotional wellness and services supporting them. This poll reveals that...

- most attendees (64%) have not accessed mental and emotional (MEW) supports/services in Regina
- attendees ranked the following supports/services as most important:
 - Professional Counseling: 21/25 or 84%
 - Supports for Children/Youth: 20/25 or 80%
 - Culturally Respectful Supports: 19/25 or 76%
 - Education/Training Opportunities (e.g. workshops): 18/25 or 72%
 - Peer Supports: 17/25 or 68%
 - Supports for Seniors: 16/25 or 64%
 - First Language Supports: 15/25 or 60%
 - Supports for Specific Genders (e.g. men, women, trans): 15/25 or 60%
 - Supports offered by Cultural/Faith Organizations: 12/25 or 48%
 - Arts Therapies: 9/25 or 36%

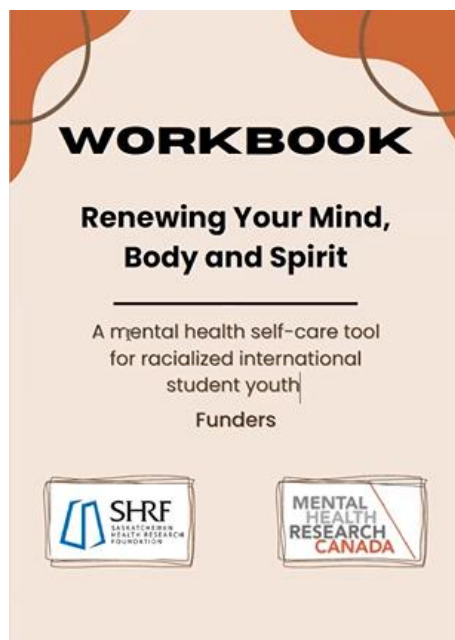
5. Panel Discussion on challenges and supports for mental and emotional wellness of newcomers. The panel was made up of local service providers and researchers, including:

- **Kendra McMurray (RIWC, Manager of Family Support & Wellness):** McMurray reported barriers such as lack of language and interpretation in counseling services, while also noting the challenges even when such interpretation is provided in these sessions, as opposed to offering services in a client's "mother tongue". Cost is also a barrier, and forming a trusting relationship with counselors if more in-depth support is needed on top of the support of frontline service providers; clients tend not to want to be referred to other professionals if they feel comfortable with RIWC staff, for example.
- **Kizito Iwuoha (Rooted Connections, Mental Health Outreach Worker):** Iwuoha identified a gap in information of where to get help and seek redress if/when newcomers face experiences such as Domestic Violence. Rooted Connections has developed a new unit - a Response Team for Domestic Violence - to provide mental health support to newcomers experiencing this. As settlement and other service providers interface with newcomers, there may be issues that come up in the course of service delivery that Rooted Connections can help clients and service providers navigate. As a newcomer himself, Kizito shared his own awareness of this information gap. From the service provider perspective, Iwuoha shared that support workers may feel ill-equipped to handle severe cases of mental health challenges, and want more support for newcomers in regards to navigating the mental health system in Regina. To respond to this, Rooted Connections has created a unit within their organization to support their caseworkers and other staff in relating to and supporting these clients; this practice has yielded positive results. Iwuoha reiterated the challenge of the information gap about where to access services and support.

- **Dr. Mamata Pandey (SHA) and Dr. Rejina Kamrul (Regina Community Clinic):** Working with clients of RIWC and based on an earlier study in partnership with Regina Community Clinic, Drs Pandey and Kamrul have focused their research on immigrants' perceptions of and access to mental health services in Regina. They emphasized that immigration is itself a stressful experience, and once arrived, immigrants and refugees face many other stressors as part of the challenges of learning and relearning what they need to live their lives here, including how and where to find the support and services they need. In their research among RIWC clients, research participants were either permanent residents or work permit holders who were receiving English language instruction from RIWC and did not have very high English language proficiency, but spoke the same language as one or more of the researchers, all of whom were bi/multilingual so that removed the language barrier challenge from this research. Participants were mainly women, had emigrated from 15 different countries, and had been in Canada for 6 years or less (women - mean length of stay: 2.8 years; men - mean length of stay: 3.4 years). In terms of the qualitative study, conducted some time ago, the research findings were consistent with the recent initial findings of the RRLIP's 2023-24 Survey on Mental and Emotional Wellness Supports for Past/Recent Newcomers in Regina (as mentioned above). Dr Pandey also offered reflections on the findings of this recent RRLIP survey, in light of the earlier research she and Dr. Kamrul had done. For example, their research highlighted a three-step approach that newcomers frequently use to address any mental or emotional challenges they may face:
 - 1) self-help (e.g. herbal teas, medicines available around the house)
 - 2) reaching out to family, friends or fellow faith community members
 - 3) professional help - but most were not very open to accessing mental/emotional healthcare through their family physician because they thought these healthcare professionals were only for general physical ailments (e.g. stomach ache or fever) rather than more specialized concerns. Newcomers were also likely only to seek help for significant medical emergencies (e.g. schizophrenia), but lacked knowledge of where to get help for less severe concerns.
- Using focus groups and interviews, Drs. Kamrul and Pandey were able to explore why newcomers might not be accessing professional help (e.g. language barriers and lack of interpretation, lack of knowledge of where to find supports, etc.), and how service provision may be approached to mitigate these barriers. Dr. Kamrul emphasized that free counseling that is culturally sensitive, socially supportive, and available in clients' first languages would "change the world of Regina." Gaps in knowledge among service providers are also a barrier, if frontline staff don't know what supports to suggest, and how to direct clients when they come into their office. Dr. Pandey acknowledged that newcomers are likely to experience challenges as they go through the (re)settlement process, and they may not talk about them in terms of mental/emotional challenges, but maybe more so as physical symptoms (e.g. difficulty sleeping, chronic pain without a physiological reason), so if healthcare practitioners/professionals are observing these, they might want to investigate further to explore the patient/client's social supports/network, work environment, and other challenges. If there are language barriers, it is very important that service providers find ways to recruit interpreters or some kind of language assistance.

- **Dr. Geoffrey Maina (University of SK Researcher):** conducted research with racialized immigrant youth and international students at the University of Regina. This research shows that immigration brings with it a loss of protective factors, such as culture, connection, freedom, familiarity, and social capital. If youth do not receive adequate support in a timely manner, they may develop “maladaptive coping behaviors” which may lead to an increased risk of mental illnesses. Part of this research project involved the youth documenting, in photos and writings in their own words, examples of their mental health experiences - both positive and negative - since coming to Regina. Some challenges identified in this “photovoice project” include:
 - finances - international students pay double tuition and are highly vulnerable to labour exploitation, as they are often unaware of Canadian labour standards and protections, or their own legal rights
 - joblessness
 - difficulties navigating the education system, with little support
 - loneliness
 - racism
 - culture shock
 - weather-related difficulties to connect socially and access transportation
 - transit system

Out of Dr. Maina’s research, an encouraging and educational workbook has been developed to share the content of the “photovoice project” and the challenges mentioned above - which, if unmitigated through various supports, can lead to a great deal of stress and more severe mental illness and other problems. Through graphics and plain language, this workbook introduces the concept of and language around mental health, signs and symptoms of stress and more severe mental illnesses, a self-appraisal tool, and resources where international students can access supports as well as record their own self-care activities so they are reinforced and become more habitual. This workbook is currently being offered as part of a pilot project, and further funding will be needed to make it more broadly available.



The image shows the "TABLE OF CONTENTS" page of the workbook. The title "TABLE OF CONTENTS" is centered at the top in bold black letters. Below the title is a table with two columns: "Description" and "Page". The table lists the following items and their corresponding page numbers:

Description	Page
Aim of the Workbook	3
Introduction	4
Stress that International Students face	5
Signs of Mental Health Illnesses	6
Photovoice Project	13
Self-appraisal	24
Mental health services	27
Self-care & journaling	29
Resources	39
Support groups	42

At the bottom of the page, there is a small decorative element consisting of a potted plant and a small circle with the number "1".

Panelist Recommendations:

Offering some recommendations as to which local stakeholders could positively impact the mental and emotional wellness of racialized immigrant youth, Dr. Maina highlighted the important role that universities and other educational institutions can play in mitigating the challenges faced by racialized youth, and suggested that settlement service providers could also play a key role; for example, by conducting an audit of available services and/or service and information gaps. He also emphasized that it is easy to pay lip service to providing culturally sensitive care/services, but service providers really need to “walk the walk”. He also identified the municipal transit services system as a key player with a role in addressing racialized youth’s transportation challenges, which can and do have a significant impact on their mental and emotional wellness. He noted that the current housing crisis is pushing youth outside of the areas that are accessible through the current transit system, adding to immigrant youths’ social isolation and stress as they struggle to access necessary resources from food to healthcare to social connection. And finally, he suggested that the local Chamber of Commerce be engaged to determine the extent of exploitation of vulnerable and marginalized individuals (including international students and other racialized immigrant youth), particularly those who need to be sponsored to become permanent residents. He likened the current situation to “a kind of modern day slavery” with which “we haven’t yet wrestled enough” to dismantle.

Dr. Pandey added to Dr. Maina’s recommendations, suggesting that healthcare service providers could work with community organizations providing settlement services, as these settlement agencies are often the first point of contact for newcomers (though it is important to note that not all newcomers come through or are connected to these agencies, upon arrival, and newcomers’ (re)settlement pathways vary, not only in Regina but across Canada; there is no “one size fits all” solution to the challenges faced by past/recent newcomers). Education and prevention in partnership with these organizations would be helpful, and also information on how to navigate the SK healthcare system, which may be quite different from the systems in newcomers’ home countries. Again, the barrier of English language proficiency was mentioned in Dr. Pandey’s recommendations, as this makes it harder to gain access to other services and supports, including healthcare; therefore, provision of language classes and/or access to interpretation are necessary to mitigate this barrier.

Dr. Kamrul also emphasized that school boards and councils could improve mental health capacity building to schools so they can better offer supports to racialized youth and their families through education, awareness raising and other efforts.

Kizito Iwuoha strongly advocated for incorporating mainstream mental health professionals within agencies that provide settlement services, to bridge the gap between these services and to support settlement and other frontline service providers in serving clients’ needs and challenges. This would also improve the mental health of service provision staff. Working in tandem would strengthen the system of support. Kendra McMurray agreed with this suggestion.

6. Forum Closing

EVENT EVALUATION

Following the Forum, RRLIP staff shared an Event Evaluation Survey. In order to collect information on all aspects of the event, including ease of access to the event itself, all registrants were asked to complete a brief survey of the event, whether or not they had attended the event. This mini-survey was sent within days of the event. The following responses were gathered:

- 70.59% respondents confirmed that they were able to join the RRLIP Virtual Event on Feb. 27, 2024.
- Did you encounter technical difficulties that affected your participation in the event? 94.21% respondents stated that they did not.
- 64.71% attendees expressed that the RRLIP Updates are valuable to them.
- 58.82% participants indicated that it was valuable to hear the initial results of the recent RRLIP Survey on Supports for Past/Recent Newcomer Mental and Emotional Wellness in Regina.
- 58.82% attendees indicated that they found the panel discussion valuable.
- 88.24% expressed interest in receiving the recording of the panel discussion.
- 41.18% of respondents found the Mental and Emotional Wellness Support: Quick Reference Sheet, distributed during and after the event, to be useful for themselves and their contacts.
- 69.23% respondents indicated that the Cultural Stigma brochure/one-sheet (shared after the event) was useful.
- 55.33% participants expressed interest in receiving information about joining the RRLIP Mental and Emotional Wellness Working Group (MEWWG)
- Any suggestions for future events? (e.g. topics, virtual/in-person, presenters, etc.)
 - More cultural events are appreciated where people get a chance to gather like cultural gathering.
 - Yes, this event should happen more frequently!
 - In-person events on topics relevant to newcomers' settlement
 - Keep it up. It was excellent.
 - Have more time for Q&A
- Additional comments:
 - Thank you very much for this very informative event!
 - Thank you. It was very well facilitated, and good information.
 - Looking forward to being a part of it at every step!
 - Great job RRLIP team! I appreciate all your efforts, hard work, care and compassion for newcomers! Thank you :)

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE COMMUNITY FORUM?

Forum participants will receive the report through email. This report will also be shared widely with the broader community in the RRLIP project blog, on the RRLIP website, through email, and in meetings with stakeholders. Information gained from or shared at this forum will inform ongoing discussions and future activities of the RRLIP MEWWG and other community partners.

RESOURCES

- [Mental and Emotional Wellness Supports Quick Reference Sheet](#) (printable with QR code)
- What Do You Think About Mental Health? ([brochure](#) and [one-sheet handout](#))
- [2023-24 Mental and Emotional Wellness Survey Report](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The RRLIP staff would like to extend our gratitude to all involved in this important community forum – all the participants, community partners, working group members, and all funders, including Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), funder of the RRLIP.

The RRLIP's work is focused in the community colonially known as Regina, on Treaty 4 land, which is recognized as the traditional territory of the nêhiyawak/Cree, Nahkawē/Saulteaux/Anihšināpēk, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, and the homeland of the Métis/Michif nation. We respectfully acknowledge the longstanding and ongoing relationship with this Land that Indigenous peoples have cultivated and maintained, and that they continue to honour and steward today. We acknowledge the past and present harms and imbalances that exist in the relationships between those who have lived on this land since time immemorial and those who came to colonize this land and the people already living on it. With humble acknowledgment of these truths and with respect for the complexities of our ongoing relationships, we continue to work toward building positive and collaborative relationships with our Indigenous hosts, and between Indigenous and past/recent newcomer members of this community in which we gratefully live and work.