

Evaluation of the Welcome Group Program

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Research Questions

- Does the program achieve its expected outcomes for refugee newcomers?
- How do refugee newcomers, volunteers and settlement staff perceive the efficiency and effectiveness of the remote and hybrid support models in meeting the needs of newcomer households?
- What existing technologies are most effective in delivering the program's intended outcomes for newcomers?
- Which newcomer client groups are best suited to benefit from the remote or hybrid support models, and under what circumstances do these groups benefit most from each model?
- How efficient and effective is the program in supporting the delivery of settlement services?

Methodology

Mixed-Methods Approach:

- Newcomer surveys at 3 points in time: at baseline, at the middle and at the end of the match
- Interviews with randomly selected newcomers 3 months after their match end
- Volunteer surveys at 2 points in time: at baseline and at the end of the match
- Interviews with settlement staff from COSTI Immigrant Services, the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, and the DIVERSEcity Community Resources Centre
- Comparison of remote and hybrid matches; the match type was determined by the format of the regular meetings between newcomers and volunteers, as chosen by them

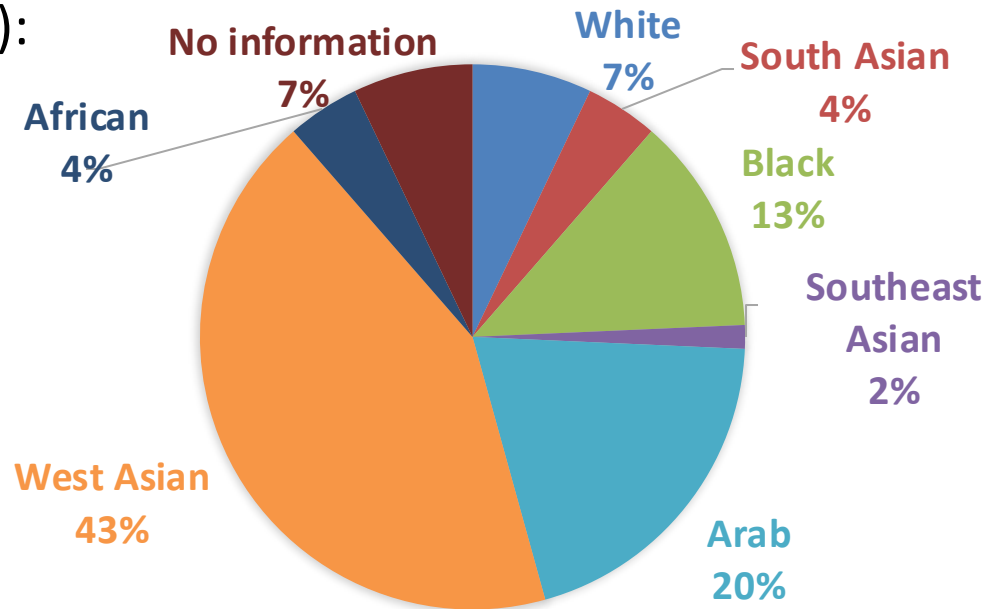
Methodology

Sample Description:

- 70 newcomers completed at least two of the three surveys
 - 57.1% ($n = 40$) were matched in the Greater Toronto Area, 32.9% ($n = 23$) in Surrey, and 10% ($n = 7$) in Ottawa
- 11 post-match interviews with newcomers
- 35 volunteers completed at least one of the two surveys
- 8 interviews with settlement staff

Demographics of Newcomers

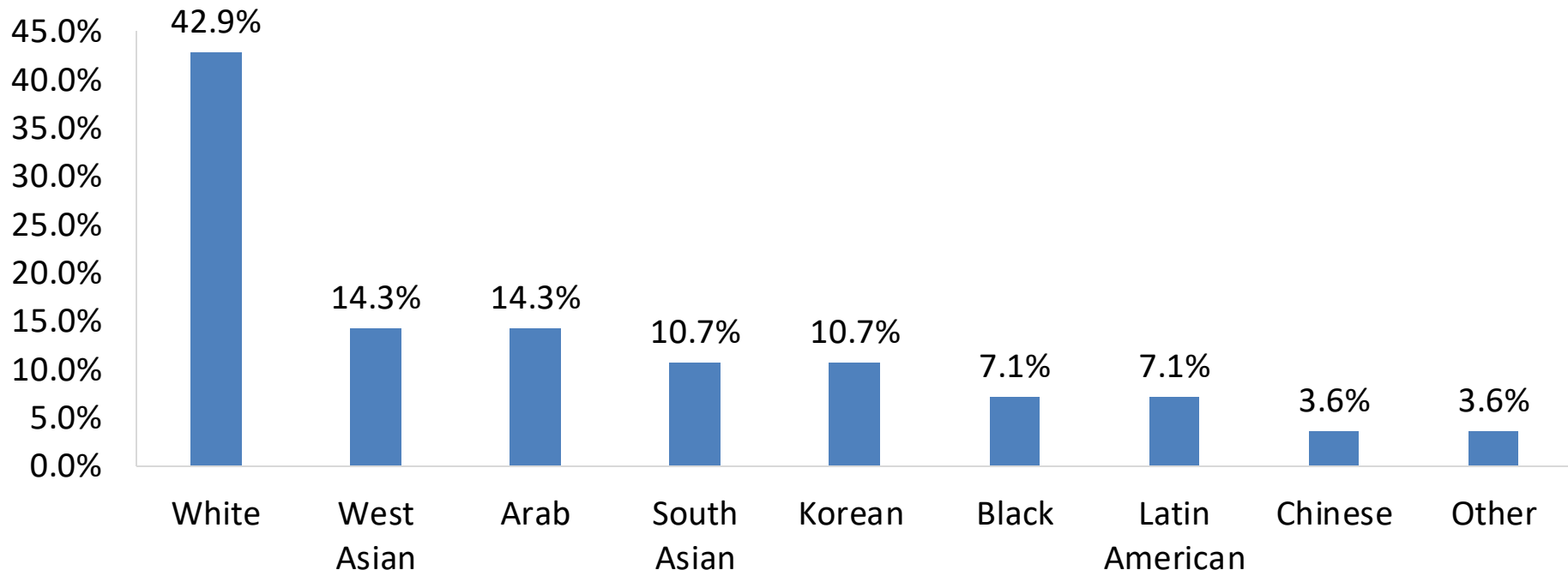
- 27 men and 43 women with an average age of 37.8 years
- Ethnicity ($n = 70$):



- The most commonly reported countries of birth were Afghanistan (42.9%, $n = 30$) and Syria (15.7%, $n = 11$)

Demographics of Volunteers

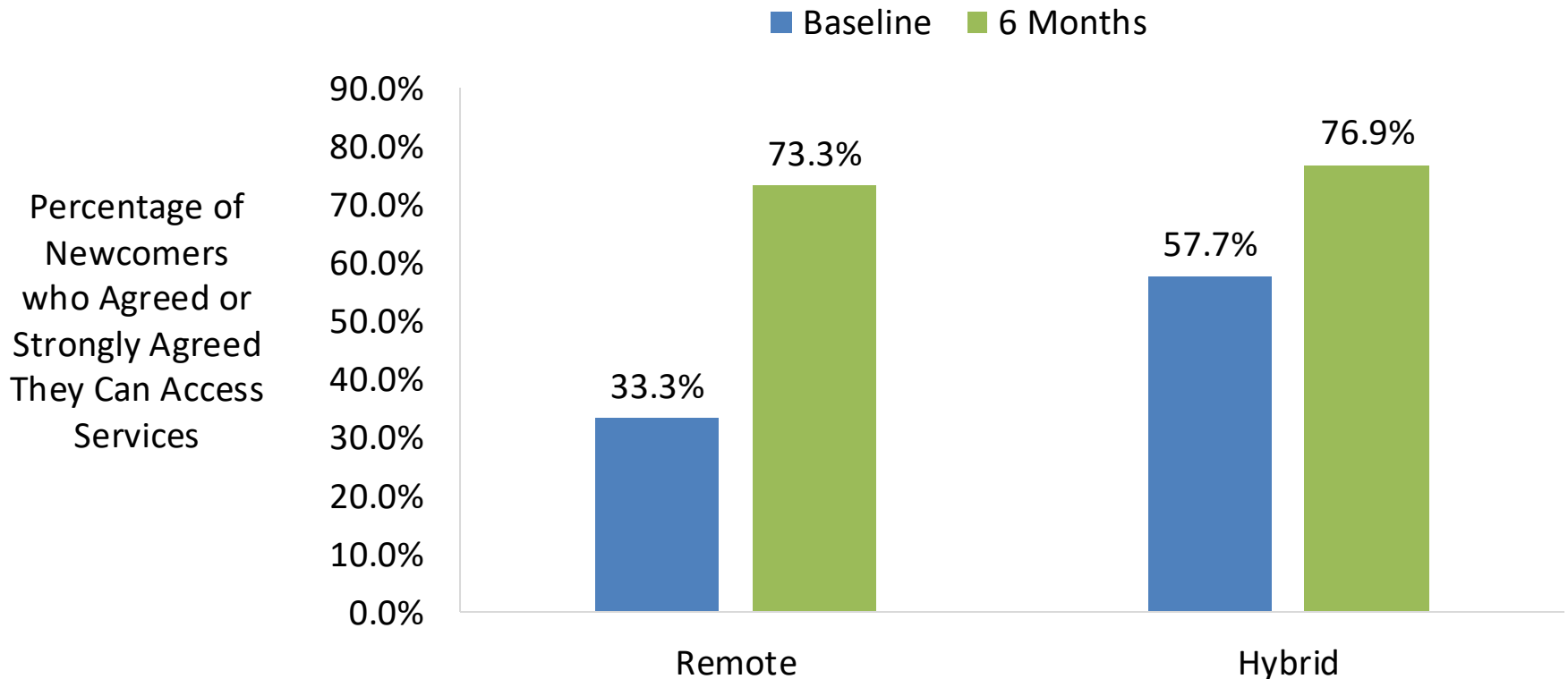
- 23 volunteers reported their age, with an average of 44.8 years
- 28 volunteers reported their gender and ethnicity:
 - 17 women and 11 men
 - Many identified as White (multiple selections possible):



Findings: Outcomes

Overall, the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes.

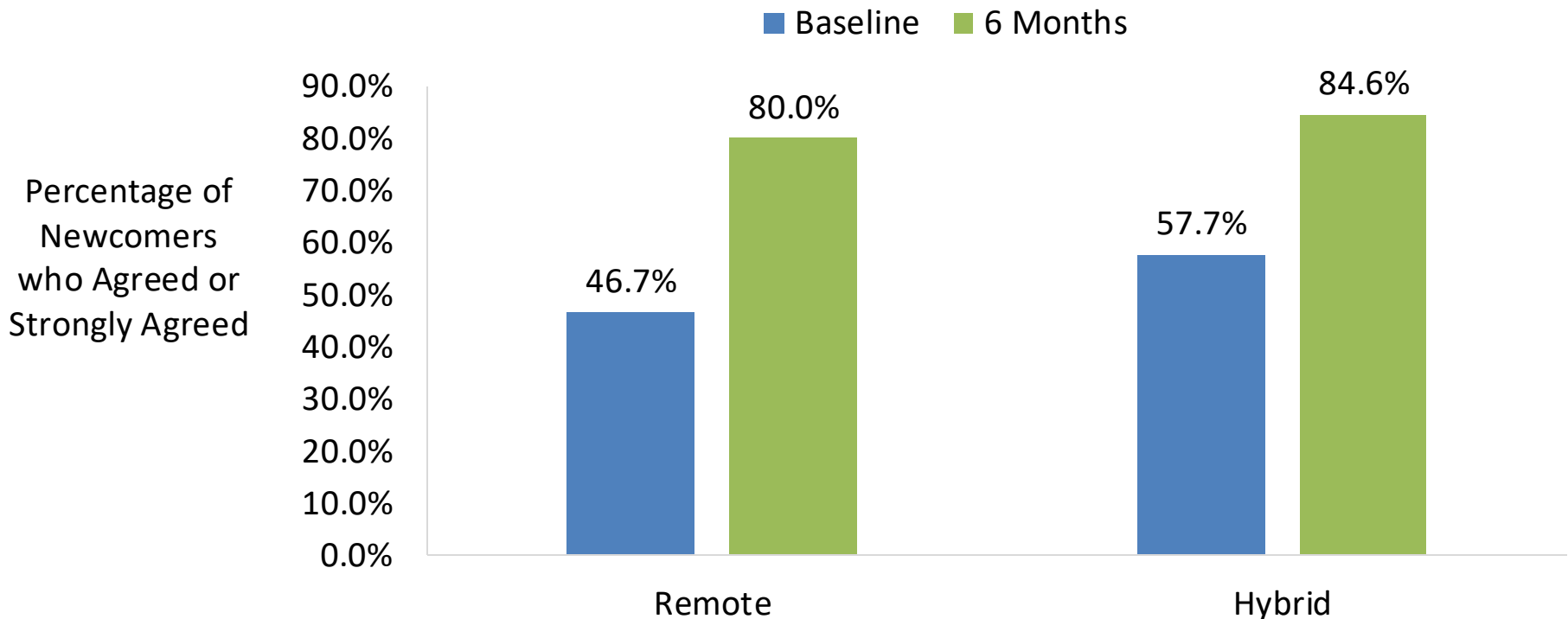
For example: [Access to services and resources](#) was improved, particularly among remote matches with limited initial access



Findings: Outcomes

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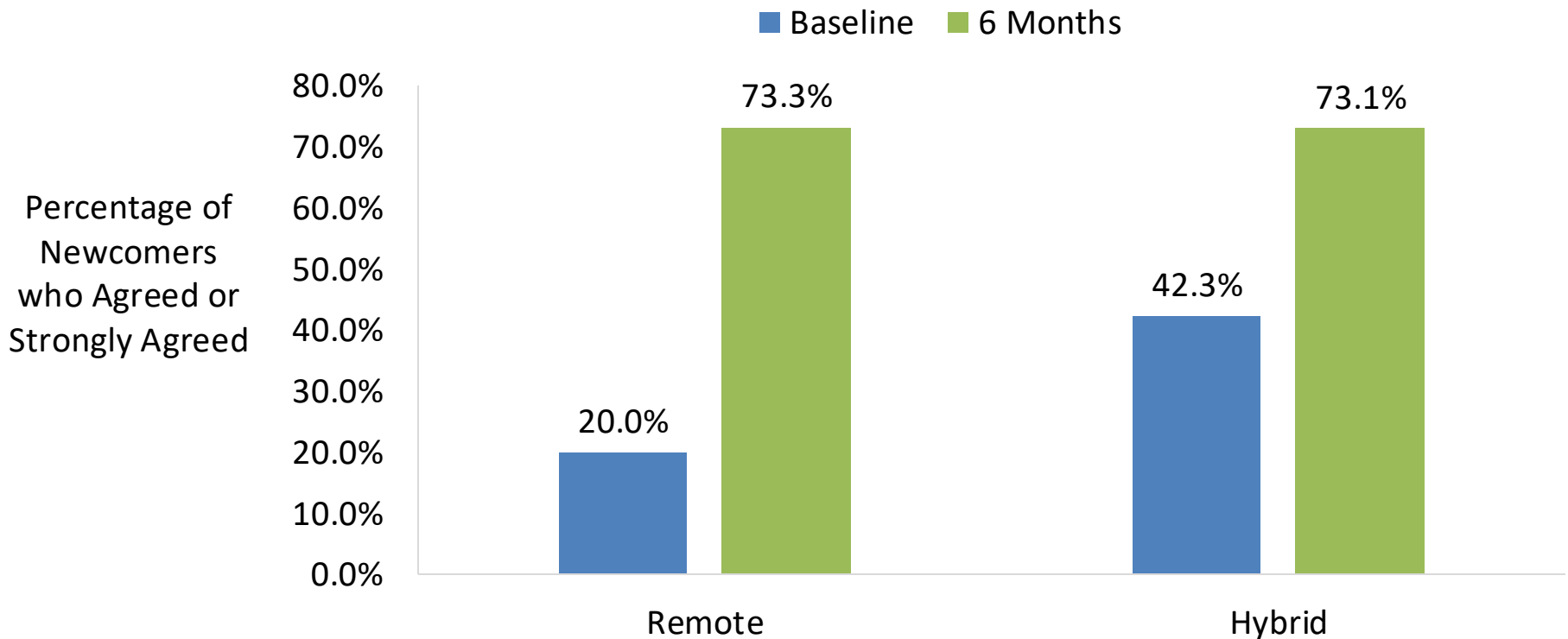
For example: Newcomers in both match types reported an increase in **having someone to talk to about their problems**



Findings: Outcomes

Overall, the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes.

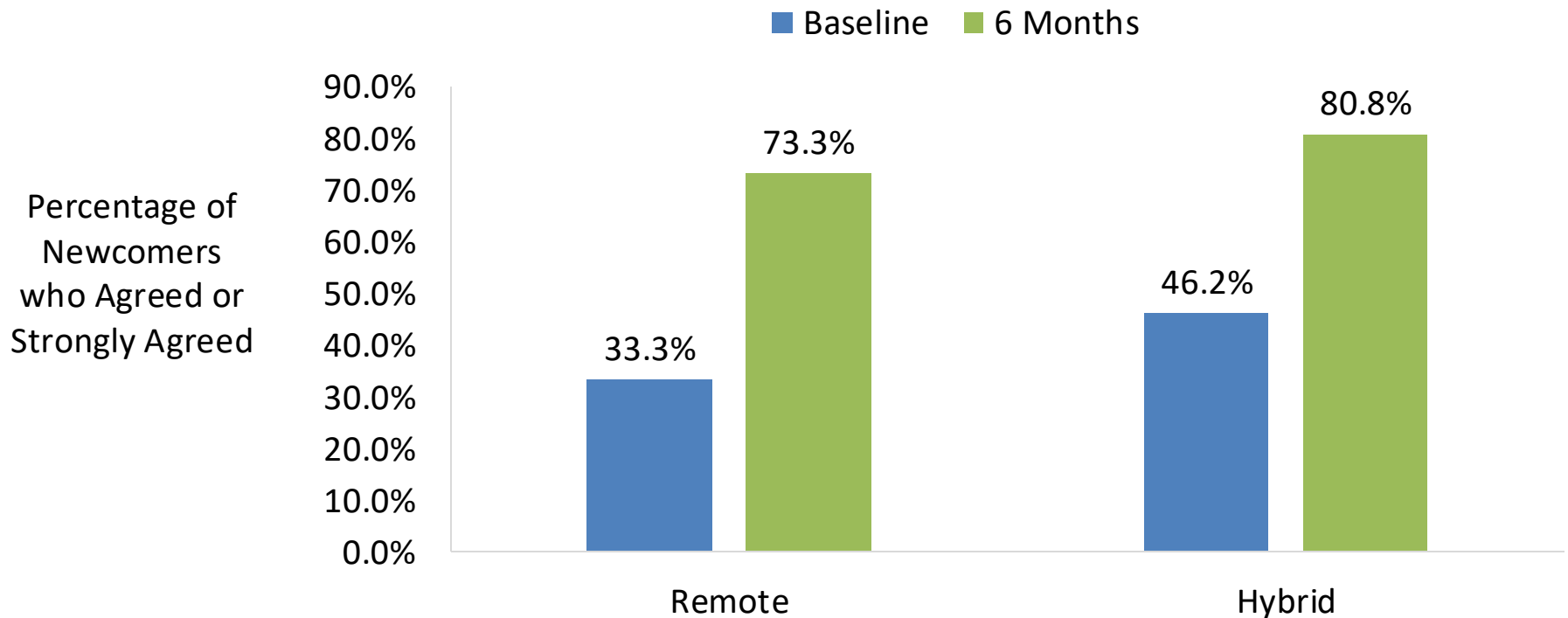
For example: Newcomers in both match types reported **progress towards their household priorities**



Findings: Outcomes

Overall, the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes.

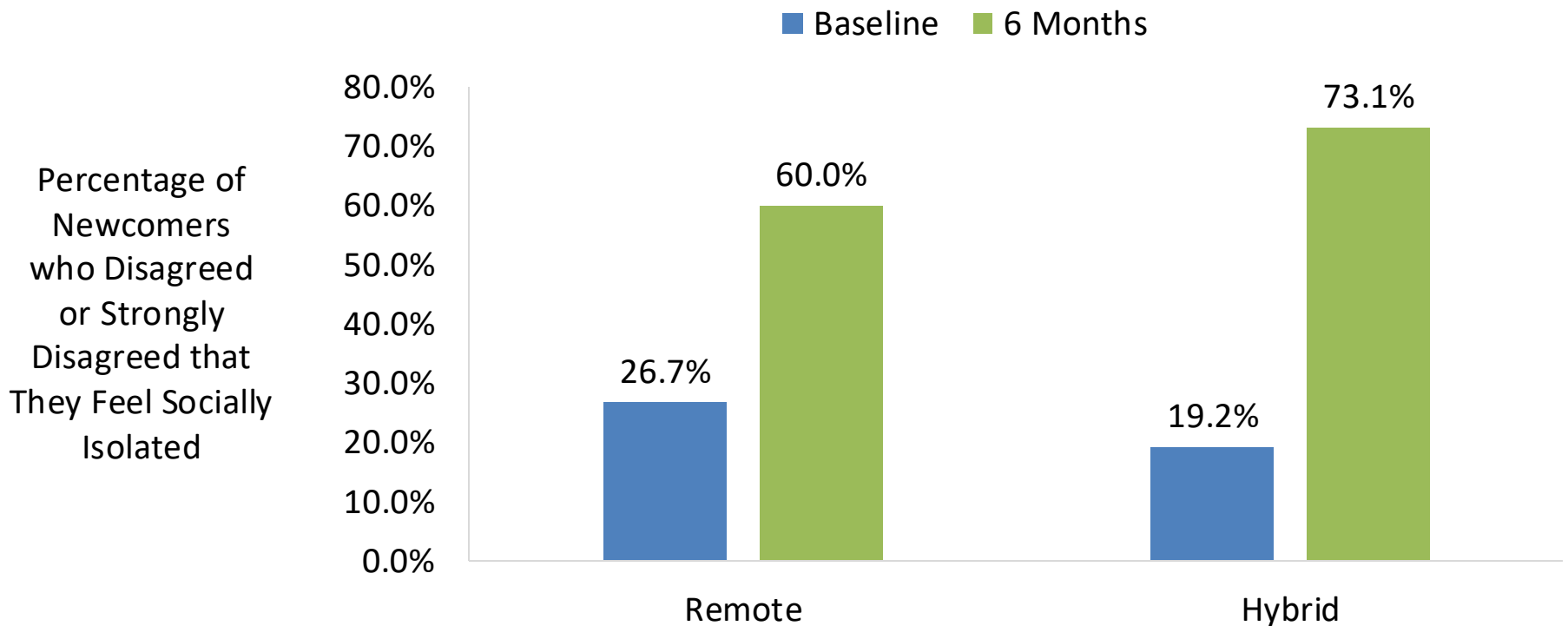
For example: Newcomers in both match types reported **feeling more connected to their communities**



Findings: Outcomes

Overall, the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes.

For example: Newcomers in both match types reported **reduced social isolation**



Findings: Outcomes

Overall, the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes.

Although outcomes were generally similar across both models, in contrast to remote match newcomers, hybrid match newcomers significantly improved in terms of...

- having people who support them in the community,
- having social connections and
- their ability to make informed decisions about their life in Canada.



Findings: Outcomes

The program also had positive effects on the volunteers and the broader community:

- Volunteers in both match types reported **a better understanding of the challenges that refugee newcomers face** (remote: 83.3%, hybrid: 84.6%).
- Volunteers in hybrid matches, in particular, noted a significant **impact on newcomers' transition to life in Canada** (remote: 50.0%, hybrid: 84.6%), contributing to more **integrated and welcoming communities** (remote: 25.0%, hybrid: 76.9%).

Findings: Effectiveness and Efficiency

- The hybrid support model was generally perceived as more effective and recognized for its flexibility, allowing newcomers and volunteers to choose the most suitable interaction method based on individual preferences, needs and circumstances.
- While in-person interactions were rated as very effective, remote interactions were appreciated for their efficiency.

“Overall, I think in person would be way more effective but if there is an availability issue or someone doesn't want to meet in person then I think remote is also good.”

Findings: Effectiveness and Efficiency

- The most commonly used platforms for remote interactions were messaging platforms, followed by video calls and phone calls (particularly in hybrid matches).
- These platforms tended to be perceived as more effective in hybrid matches than in remote matches.
- Text messages and emails were less frequently used and showed mixed results in terms of their effectiveness.

Findings: Suitability of Interaction Methods

- **Remote Interactions:**
 - Ideal for those with work and family commitments or geographic and transportation challenges, as they minimize the need to travel
- **In-person Interactions:**
 - Best for newcomers with low English language proficiency or limited technology skills
 - Especially effective for specific challenges (e.g., navigating healthcare, managing important paperwork, and attending appointments)

Findings: Impact on Service Delivery

- Most settlement staff reported that the Welcome Group Program effectively improved their capacity to offer responsive and coordinated services.
- They emphasized the program's strong organization, supportive collaboration, and the dedication of the volunteers.

“We've worked side by side. And I feel like it was a shoulder that we could lean on. For the things that we couldn't provide support.”

“It's well organized and they take the time to train their volunteers. And, you know, the volunteers tend to be very caring people, supportive and caring people. So, it makes a difference.”

Findings: Impact on Service Delivery

- The program helped:
 - to reduce the frequency of direct interactions with clients, lightening workload.
 - newcomers to articulate their needs more clearly and specifically, enhancing their subsequent interactions with caseworkers.
- However, challenges were mentioned:
 - Increased coordination needs and the potential of duplication of efforts, especially when volunteers address issues already being handled by caseworkers

Recommendations

- Improve the communication and coordination between caseworkers and volunteers
- Provide clear definitions and communication of roles and expectations for caseworkers and volunteers, and communicate these to newcomers
- Expand the volunteer pool to include more individuals who speak the clients' languages to help reduce the wait times between onboarding and match start



Recommendations

- Continue to provide support to volunteers for handling complex cases
- Distribute multilingual flyers to newcomers soon after their arrival to raise awareness about the program
- Consider adopting a more flexible approach to match duration depending on clients' needs

Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank...
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Further Information

- For the full report, please see <https://www.togetherproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Together-Project-2024Evaluation.pdf>
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Back Up

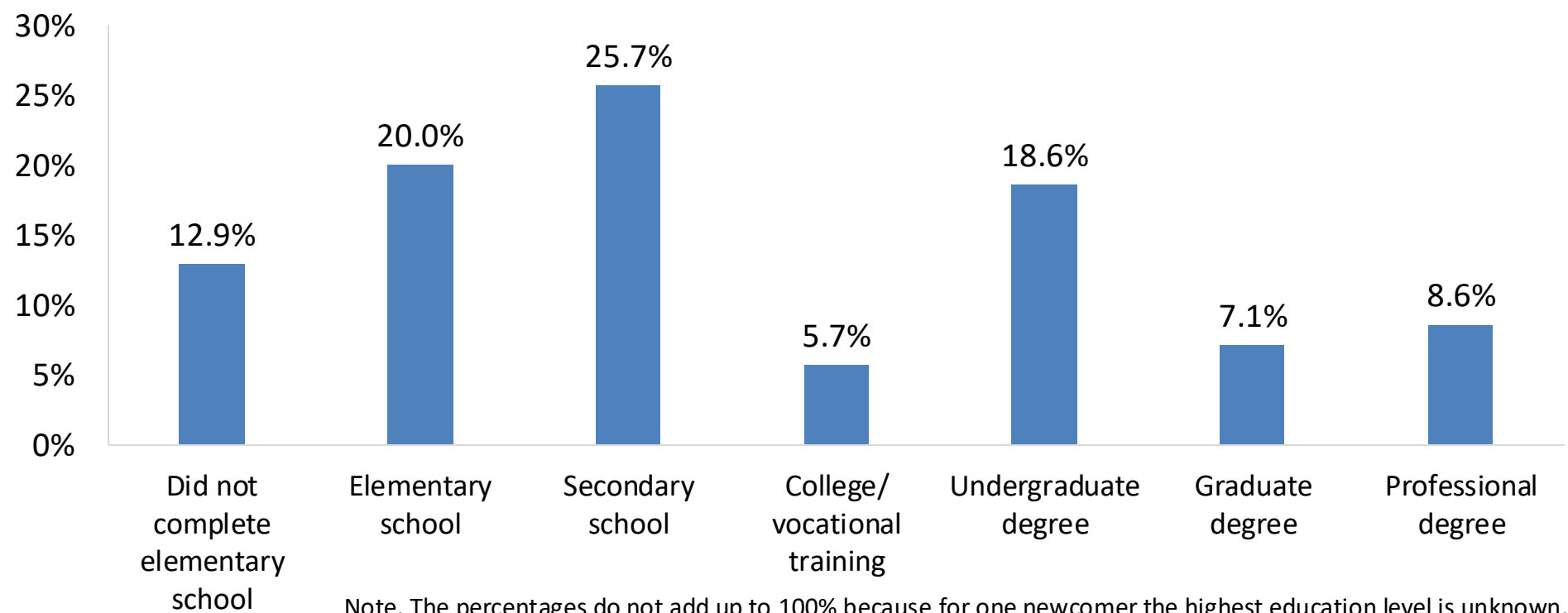


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Demographics of Newcomers

- 90.0% of newcomers entered Canada as government assisted refugees, 2.9% were protected persons, and 7.1% were Ukrainian CUAET arrivals
- Newcomers' education levels varied:



Demographics of Volunteers

- 28 volunteer reported their country of birth; 42.9% were born in Canada
- Volunteers not born in Canada entered Canada as refugees (31.3%), family class immigrants (18.8%), or economic class immigrants (25.0%) – the rest said another category or don't know (12.5% each)
- Most volunteers had a postgraduate degree:

