

WESTERN NEWS

Bringing New Opportunity to the Community

By Francis Siebert
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Victoria Esses has been researching discrimination, immigration and prejudice for more than 20 years. She's taught psychology, published papers and won awards. She has been named a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) postdoctoral fellow at the University of Waterloo and a SSHRC research fellow at the University of Toronto.



But deep down, Esses wasn't completely satisfied with her work. "At some point, I realized the research I was doing, although enjoyable, wasn't all that practical," she said.

The problem, as she saw it, was the work she was doing wasn't affecting immigration and refugee policies. It wasn't relevant to the needs of the communities.

So, in 2008, Esses founded a province-wide alliance based out of Western called the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI). Its purpose was to promote the integration of immigrants, refugees and minorities by doing research that combines academic knowledge and the resources available in the communities.

After a few successful years, Esses and her team decided to expand the project in 2012 to the rest of Canada, and Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) was founded.

"The goal is to do work that's practical, that's relevant to the communities in which we're working and to do work that has real implications for policy and practice," said Esses, who is the principal investigator at P2P.

The alliance, which operates on a \$13.5 million budget, has about 200 researchers in more than 50 universities across Canada. It has partnerships with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, every provincial immigration ministry and about 25 universities and municipal governments in total. P2P also has partnerships with many community organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee in Saskatchewan and the Association for New Canadians in Newfoundland.

"They are the bridge between the community and academia," said Huda Hussein, the project coordinator at the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP), a

partner of P2P's, whose objective is to help immigrants integrate with different aspects of society.

When the LMLIP was founded in 2009, it was the research of P2P that helped the project write its first strategic plan.

The WCI did a survey on immigrant settlements in the community. It looked at the needs of immigrants, what organizations already existed, where these organizations were located and how they served newcomers.

"It is very helpful," Hussein said. "Without that information, I don't think we'd be able to do much."

With the information the WCI provided, the LMLIP came up with the Community Immigrant Strategic Plan. The plan identified issues, such as transportation and housing, and resolutions related to the integration of immigrants in London and Middlesex.

Today, P2P has regional nodes located in British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic. It also has a national node, which is housed at Western, along with the Ontario node, that oversees the alliance and works with the regional nodes.

Since its founding, P2P has been involved in a number of projects, from working with the federal government to working with community organizations.

One project the alliance has been working on with Citizenship and Immigration Canada for several years now is setting up Local Immigration Partnerships like the LMLIP across Canada.

Esses and her team have been doing research for the department, looking at what are the best practices for local immigration partners and how to make sure that they're operating as efficiently and effectively as possible.

One question P2P is trying to answer is how to measure the effectiveness of these partnerships from an organizational perspective and in terms of the community outcomes they promote.

More recently, in 2013, P2P did a followup survey to the one it did in London and Middlesex in 2010.

"Our impact council needs to be aware of what's going in the community, what services are being provided, where are the duplications, where are the gaps, where are the opportunities," said Janet Tufts, director of community partnership and investments at United Way of London & Middlesex.

Tufts said the new survey will help the organization make informed decisions regarding investments, advocacy, and mobilizing the community.

"It's really rewarding," Esses said about her work. "It kind of builds because you see the impact your research is having, and then you want to do more work like that."

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