



Performance Management Support

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) continues to be committed to providing performance management assistance to LBS service providers. Through this newsletter, LLSC shares tools, resources and information that can be used to impact your organization's performance management. If there are specific topics you would like to see in upcoming issues, please contact Literacy Link South Central at literacylink@gmail.com.

Learning Together - Immigrants and Education

On March 7th, LLSC and community partners held a one-day event titled Learning Together. We have many educational and community services funded by different Ministries that work to assist newcomers and immigrants. The goal of Learning Together was to begin a conversation between newcomers and immigrants and the full range of educational and social services that support them in our community.

The day consisted of two facilitated conversations – one in the morning and one in the afternoon, the participants of each joining over lunch to hear an informative speaker on education and social connectedness. During the facilitated conversations, four questions were asked. Below, we list the four questions and have grouped the responses into themes.

What might prevent newcomers/immigrants from achieving their educational goals?

The most commonly identified responses to this question have been grouped together under the term "acclimatization to culture." Respondents used words like *overwhelmed*, *fear* and *intimidation* and *culture shock* to describe why they feel newcomers/immigrants struggle to reach their educational goals. Some newcomers have spent years in a refugee camp and so have little understanding of any formal educational system. Other newcomers and immigrants identified that their cultures hold different perspectives related to education and who is entitled to access it and when, making it challenging to understand and use Canadian educational programs. Respondents suggested that skills they do have that they feel confident with don't always translate well in Canadian context – especially people skills, conflict resolution, delegation, and management skills).

The second most common response to this question includes a lengthy list of specific barriers that immigrants and newcomers encounter when they attempt to increase their educational levels, including:

- Language barriers
- Transportation challenges
- Child care responsibilities, including when children get sick and have to stay home from school
- Caregiving responsibilities that interfere with attendance in educational programs
- A lack of social networks
- Mental health/physical health issues, including trauma
- Challenges with technology
- Challenges with traditional gender roles
- Loss of status (having to start all over again)
- Racism experienced within educational/community services
- The long period of time it takes to achieve the education/recognition of credentials they require to work in a meaningful field

What makes a person feel like they belong and are socially connected?

This question was asked of attendees because research suggests that the degree to which a person feels socially connected or like they belong is related to their success in education.

The dominant theme that emerged from the conversations was the need for social networks and supports. This need was expressed in a variety of different ways, including the more general needs like having someone to call “family.” There was also a need for feeling a sense of connectedness by belonging to community groups to more specific social networks and supports like those that could guide a newcomer/immigrant through community services. Numerous attendees suggested that community services, including cultural groups might consider consolidating or amalgamating so that it is less confusing to navigate services and to bring different cultures and experiences together, noting the importance of having public spaces where are all welcome. Several mentions were also made of the need for more (in general) and more specific conversation circles, or at least better awareness of the conversation circles that do exist. Clearly, part of developing a sense of belonging and social connectedness relies upon the ability to use English – not just “correctly” as in using the right grammar and vocabulary – but also being adept in the use of English in various social settings – in conversation, at work, etc.

The need for social networks and supports was closely followed by a keen desire for service providers to understand the newcomer/immigrant experience – to understand what newcomers and immigrants may have lost in order to come to Canada. Some newcomers need time to grieve, especially if the decision to come to Canada was not theirs because they were forced to flee their homes because of war or other forms of persecution.

Spirituality – the recognition of different types of spirituality and the need to consider spirituality as central to individuals – was also identified as integral to assisting people in

feeling a sense of belonging. This suggests that spirituality is part of looking at an individual holistically.

Another important theme that emerged from the conversations related to time – taking the time to really listen to an immigrant or newcomer’s story, and to respect the individual for what they DO bring to Canada, and not just focusing on what they do not.

How can we do a better job in helping newcomers/immigrants feel socially connected?

The most popular response to this question involves having newcomers and immigrants as part of our educational and social systems – not just as clients, but also as employees, as “they best understand the history, experience and needs of newcomers if they are newcomers themselves” because “you see the same ghosts in each other’s eyes and can connect in a way you couldn’t with someone else no matter how well-meaning or helpful they are.”

For current employees of educational and community services focuses on newcomers and immigrants, suggestions included actively showing respect for different cultures and recognizing that not all forms of intervention are common in other parts of the world. For example, volunteerism is not practiced world-wide and there are many newcomers/immigrants who do not understand why volunteerism can be positive – both in terms of social connectedness and in terms of learning English or finding avenues into employment.

Another theme that emerged related to better helping newcomers/immigrants feel socially connected is service planning. Suggestions here involved more creative marketing and including immigrants in conducting outreach to their own cultural groups to facilitate trust and information sharing, as well as making the range of services easier to navigate/less confusing and ensuring that the full range of community options is presented to newcomers/immigrants. There was also a call to action related to establishing meaningful connections between organizations.

Summary

Overwhelmingly, Learning Together was a wonderful event. The evaluations from both immigrants/newcomers and from service providers were extremely positive. It is clear from evaluation comments that more of these events are desired, more collaboration between educational services and community services is expected, required and desired.

We cannot continue to conceive of and deliver services in silos. We must continue to improve our understanding of newcomers and immigrants, to address the barriers they face, to wrap our educational and community services around them in meaningful ways,

and to increase our own understandings of the value of social connectedness and how to promote it in the work we do.

Questions or comments?



If you have any questions or comments about this newsletter, please email us at literacylink@bellnet.ca or call us at 519.681.7307.

If you have any suggestions for future content that you'd like to see, we'd love to hear from you as well.