



Measuring
Rural Community
Vitality

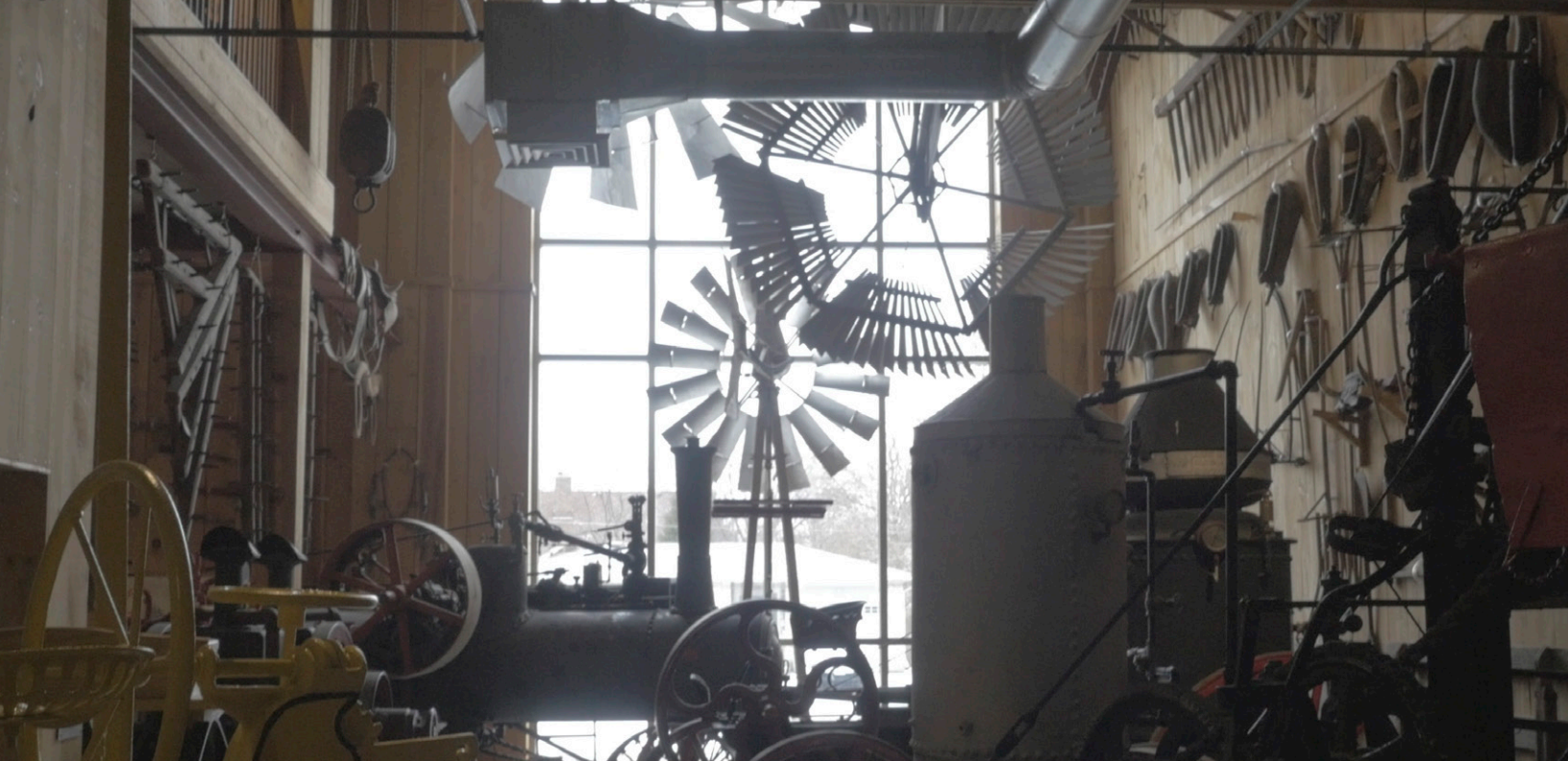
Newcomer Engagement and Social Capital in Rural Communities

SPOTLIGHT ON
HURON COUNTY

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RURAL ONTARIO
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This document is one of three case studies for a March 2017 Rural Ontario Institute project entitled **Newcomer Engagement and Social Capital in Rural Communities**. A summary report, case studies for Dufferin County and Northumberland County, and companion YouTube video links are available at www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

| COUNTY OVERVIEW

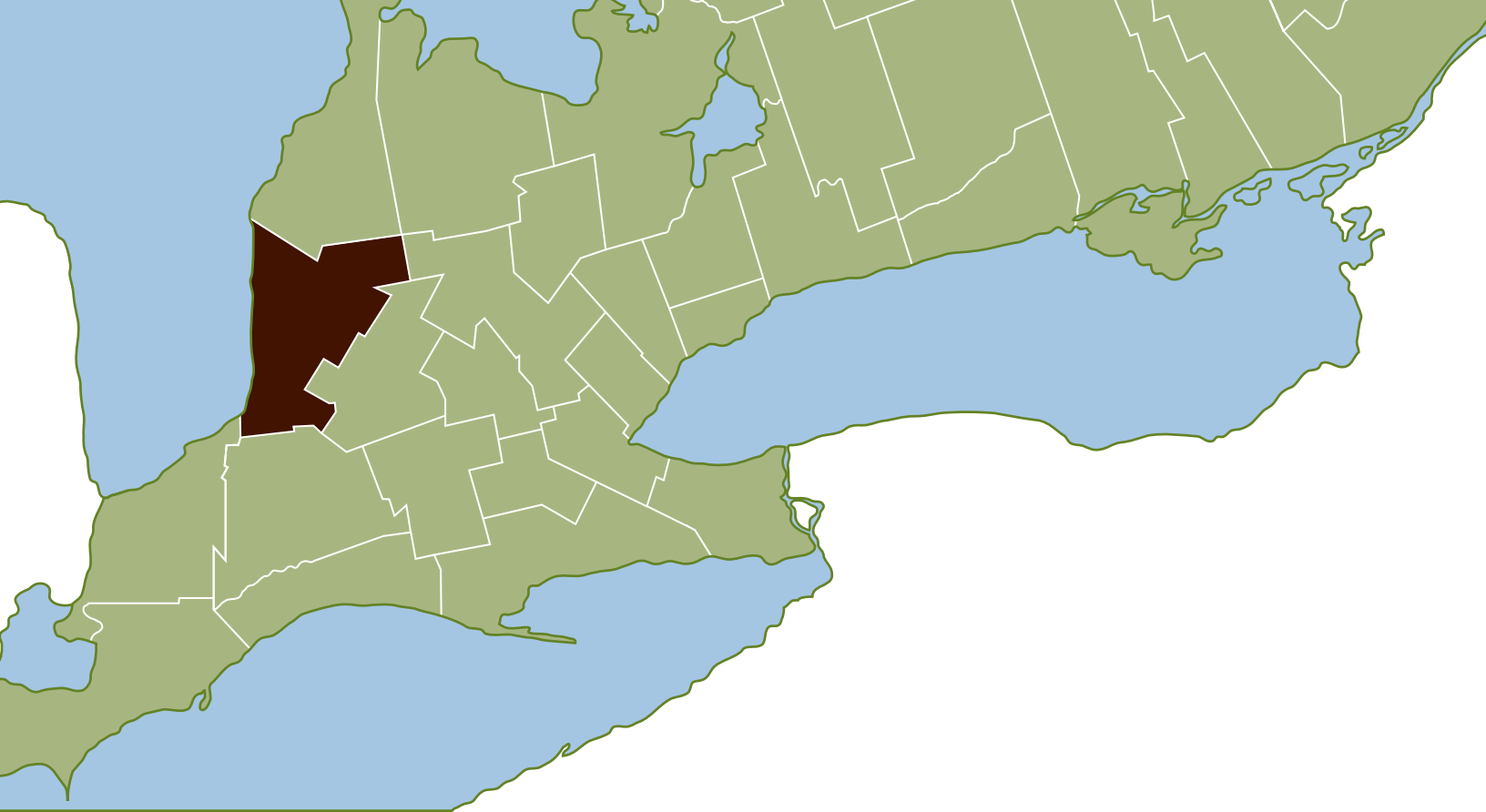
Huron County is located on the southeast shore of its namesake, Lake Huron, in southwestern Ontario. The county is comprised of nine municipalities: Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh, Bluewater, Central Huron, Goderich, Howick, Huron East, Morris-Turnberry, North Huron, and South Huron. The 2016 Census reported the Huron County population to be 59,297 in a land area of 3,399 square kilometers (Statistics Canada, 2016). Of the total population, 7,628 reside in Goderich, the county seat and largest community (Ibid). It is recognized for lively communities with exceptional lifestyle opportunities and businesses in the manufacturing, agri-business, tourism, and creative industries (County of Huron Planning and Development Department, 2015). Due in large part to its significant and productive agriculture and manufacturing base, Huron County has become a recognized leader in agricultural technology and innovation. With an available skilled workforce committed to living in this region, Huron County's business community welcomes new partners, investors and entrepreneurs. The majority of businesses are family-owned (72%), compared to 11% franchise businesses (Ibid). Local arts, culture, heritage, and history combine to celebrate and preserve this unique sense of place.

Huron offers a wide range of informative resources to help newcomers adjust to life on Ontario's West Coast. Service Ontario and Service Canada, two government agencies that provide many essential services to residents, have offices located in Huron (County of Huron Economic Development, 2015). There are various services and amenities that make Huron County a great place to live, including affordable housing, great schools, and lots of recreational activities, arts, heritage and cultural experiences (County of Huron Economic Development Services, 2015).

Newcomer participation in local communities is an important mechanism for facilitating community development, strengthening local growth, and building social capital. This case study forms part of a study evaluating the role of newcomer engagement by conducting interviews with four main stakeholder groups in three rural counties — Dufferin, Huron, and Northumberland. Using a case-study approach, community members, county leadership, service providers, and newcomers were asked questions regarding social capital resources that were available in their local communities and their perspectives about the processes by which newcomers were able to leverage and grow their social capital in the area. There were a total of 39 participants in this study in Huron County through telephone interviews, in-person interviews, 2 focus groups, as well as online community surveys.

For the purpose of this study, **newcomer** was defined as a person who has moved into the community in the last 5 years. It is a wide definition that includes those who have moved from abroad, from elsewhere in Canada, or moved back after a significant time away. **Social capital** was defined as the resources and associated benefits people have access to through their social networks and relationships.

This study recognizes that effective newcomer participation often depends on the maximization of newcomer involvement and the establishment of vibrant social networks. It also acknowledges that each county and community is unique and has different assets that facilitate newcomer integration into a community.



Some of the strengths and barriers found in Huron County include:

Strengths

- Collaboration. From partnerships with church groups for sponsored Syrian refugees, to the United Way Perth-Huron County partnerships, collaboration among groups was key, particularly for a rural area where population size is small. Partnering with other counties improved programs and support systems for newcomers and residents.
- Informative online resources for prospective newcomers such as the **Invest in Huron** and **Make Huron Home** websites.
- Provision of language classes
- Provision of immigrant newcomer resources and services

Barriers

- Lack of attention paid to regional newcomers. Most of the mobilization for newcomer support was allocated to helping Syrian and immigrant newcomers. Although the difference in need was acknowledged, newcomers from other provinces or communities in Ontario had less specialized supports.
- Few transportation alternatives for newcomers seeking employment. Although sponsorship groups often worked in collaboration with community members and service agencies to provide volunteer drivers or carpooling opportunities, transportation was still a major barrier.
- Limited coordination and a lack of shared knowledge among stakeholders of available resources. Many are engaged in similar efforts and could benefit from centralized supports and collaboration.

SOCIAL CAPITAL ASSESSMENT OF COUNTY

Social inclusion through social support is essential for newcomers in rural communities. A person rich in social capital has a high level of connection to their community, networks, and supports. They are able to leverage these resources for their own benefit and that of the community. As such, measuring the ways by which newcomers are supported and engaged will help us better understand how communities can create inclusive environments. See **Appendix II – Huron County: Additional Social Capital Resources** for a comprehensive literature review of other social capital resources.

The experience of moving to Huron County differed among newcomers. Nearly all participants described the community in a positive light (i.e. friendly or kind). The major challenge for newcomers involved transportation barriers. Without a license or access to a vehicle, travelling within or between counties was very difficult. The lack of public transit amplified newcomer challenges associated with seeking employment and managing the high costs of living.

Community members noted that their own social capital relied mainly on family, friends, and professional peers. They felt that these personal networks provided the most emotional and moral support, in addition to some assistance from individual referrals and professional services. Newcomer opinion also varied when describing their level of social connection. Some felt that the responsibility for developing social networks fell upon themselves. Others felt that greater institutional support would have helped ease their transition.

Personal Relationships: The Foundation for Strong Social Capital Systems

The large majority of newcomers had no connections with, or possessed little information on, the community prior to arrival. Many moved with their significant other due to new job opportunities in the county. Some experienced culture shock since it was their first time in Canada and they did not know what to expect. Having family members in the area significantly increased their access to information and involvement in the community. Through their existing family connections, many were able to meet new people. Conversely, those who had no family connections prior to their arrival responded that they built relationships with their coworkers, neighbours, sponsors, and volunteers. Community gatherings at church and holiday celebrations also brought people together and provided an opportunity to socialize. County leaders emphasized that newcomers are primarily informed about organizations and social activities through referrals, such as those from neighbours and colleagues.

Neighbours and Friends

Existing community members played a vital role in supporting newcomers during the first year of living in the community. Newcomers expressed gratitude to their neighbours for sharing lots of information, from support services to local attractions and history. Elderly neighbours were appreciated for sharing their experiences and advice with young families relocating to rural communities.

“Because these families do not have their usual family network, the community needs to step in to help them provide that, act like an extended family.”

- Community Member

Workplace Colleagues

Some newcomers discussed how colleagues from the workplace were a great source of guidance for acquiring information and learning about the community, thereby underscoring the role of employment in building social capital. Aside from connecting with colleagues, newcomers were also able to connect with the community through establishing friendships and having an active social life.

“People often find out about things through other people or at work. You talk to coworkers and they let you know about things that are going on.”

- County leader

Community Groups, Churches and Recreational Activities

Community participation played a significant role in building relationships and social connections for all participants. Service providers highlighted specialized community groups as a major source of support for newcomers. Some examples offered by community members include: church sponsorships, museums, clubs, and local businesses. Faith, recreational or business communities were credited with facilitating a quicker transition for newcomers into a comfortable and settled life. These community groups were discussed as a source of friendship and emotional support for newcomers.

“At the end of the day, church groups and community service groups are probably the single biggest factor to make recruitment and retention successful. They provide a stable, friendly, safe environment which isn’t going to go away (not dependent on government funding, not a one-off project) — these are people who enjoy welcoming people to the area. They do it by literally reaching out to them.”

- Service Provider

Service providers and county leaders described the average newcomer as being either highly disconnected or somewhat disconnected. The exception was if they were involved in a faith community or if their children participated in sports. Church groups made an effort to stay connected with newcomers. Similarly, parents with active children were able to integrate into parent networks. However, aside from these exceptions, the average newcomer did not have a social network. In particular, neighbourhood friendliness did not translate into community support.

“I get told often by people new into our area how friendly people are, but friendly doesn’t mean friends.”

- Service Provider

“There’s a difference in welcoming someone versus embracing someone, incorporating them in the community is two different things — a cultural thing. People need places where they can connect at a deeper level, there aren’t that many ways to do that in today’s world.”

- Service Provider

For refugees, sponsorship groups provided stable support before and after moving into the area. Churches played a fundamental role in offering needed services, as well as more physical aspects of support, such as assisting individuals with childcare, locating work, finding places to live, and furthering education. Various organizations and groups involved with the sponsorship of the Syrian refugees collaborated and organized efforts to respond to their needs upon their arrival in the community. This collaboration and coordination of efforts allowed community groups to maximize the use of their own social capital in order to provide for the needs of refugees.

Participants noted that although the means of integration are highly effective for social newcomers, there is a greater barrier for introverted newcomers and non-churchgoers who are unable to tap into the social capital of faith communities. Nevertheless, for the majority, community groups, churches, and recreational activities were credited with creating an effective social support system, thus having a significant impact on newcomer experience in the community. Service providers attributed the discrepancy between newcomer experiences and participation in social activities to the differences among neighbourhood cultures and the level of neighbour-to-neighbour support.

Online Resources

Newcomers described online tools as being the most effective way to retrieve information and support prior to their arrival in Huron County. Specifically, **Huron County** and **Town of Goderich** websites served as informative online tools to obtain documents and information about the community. Newcomers made particular mention of the **Make Huron Home** website as a resource full of helpful information for newcomers.

Although mostly discussed in a positive light, there were a few cases reported of newcomers finding slight discrepancies between the information found online prior to moving to the county and the reality of the community. This was not necessarily a negative experience in all cases. For example, one participant mentioned that while they had researched Huron County prior to arrival, they found the community was portrayed as a retirement community. They were happily surprised when they arrived and found that the county offered many opportunities for both young and old. Another challenge was keeping online information up to date or knowing how to access it. Some newcomers remembered not knowing how to access volunteer opportunities or information on community events.

Social Services

Community members discussed various community services that supported newcomers. Newcomers received support from various sources during their first year of living in Huron County. While some received support from family and friends, most newcomers received support from service providers. Libraries, the **Ontario Early Years Centre** (OEYC), employment agencies, and various other organizations such as the **YMCA** and the **Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire** (IODE) gathering for women were said to facilitate newcomers' social network building efforts. Doctor's offices, hospitals and pharmacists were also discussed as great outlets to obtain information and build relationships.

Libraries

Social services provided newcomers with the opportunity to meet new people and become familiar with the community members. Community-based centers such as the library were mentioned as great place for immigrants to connect, especially through programs such as “Meet your Neighbour”, where newcomers can go to the library to meet others who are also new to the community. The library is active in welcoming and supporting newcomers by offering books in English and other languages, as well as by providing welcome packages to newcomers.

A successful engagement initiative by refugee settlement groups and the Bayfield library is the “**Coffee and Conversation**” group, which offers newcomers a chance to interact with other locals and form deeper connections. This has been particularly helpful to newcomer retirees. Another effective way to integrate newcomers to the community is by hosting multicultural events that highlight the importance of diversity and bring awareness to the community.

Ontario Early Years Centre

Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) is another organization supporting parents by providing them with information and support services. The OEYC was applauded for significantly improving newcomers’ transition into the community through welcoming spaces and workshops.

Employment Services

An important outlet discussed by newcomers was employment outreach services. **The Centre for Employment and Learning**, Career Centres, and **Partners in Employment** were highlighted by newcomers as great supports in helping them better navigate the community. **Engage Huron** was also mentioned for its contributions in recruiting and supporting young professionals in the community, assisting them in finding their social networks. Huron County was commended for the range of programs and advisory services to help start local businesses. A great feature of these organizations is their referral system. Participants discussed how staff in these organizations made a conscious effort to make social and professional referrals as appropriate. Volunteer-run employment organizations were also discussed as a great support for newcomers who need assistance in pursuing a career in the community.

Employment counsellors were particularly praised by newcomers for being very helpful in guiding them to the right contacts and agencies. They not only allowed newcomers to find jobs but also to connect with other newcomers. Some discussed how the employment service went beyond their mandate and even provided emotional support to newcomers.

“It was not easy to come to Canada...I miss my home country and sometimes I would sit down and think I am not going forward. [My employment counsellor] has supported me emotionally, saying ‘Hang in there, let’s try to make things better.’”

- Newcomer

Immigrant Newcomer Supports

Reducing System Barriers

For refugee and immigrant newcomers, community members felt that the primary support they received occurred through sponsorship groups. This support included any advice or guidance provided to navigate services, as well as any direct support in accessing programs. For example, sponsors often provided transportation and childcare for newcomers while their parents were at work.

County leaders reported that most of the existing community support is geared towards immigrants and refugees, such as ESL classes, employment counselling, and medical care. English language classes offered through the Centre for Employment and Learning of Avon Maitland were highlighted as an integral source of support. In particular, command of the English language allowed newcomers to build their social network as well as develop employment opportunities and skills. Similarly, local networks and agency referrals eased access to important social services. These programs attracted newcomers to help them find work and promoted multiculturalism in the community. Newcomers and sponsorship groups discussed how great the community has been in giving newcomers an opportunity to be in the workforce. An example shared during an interview was of a construction company that hired a Syrian worker who had previous experience reading blueprints.

“It was interesting to see and watch that unfold — how people came together to support newcomers in that situation.”

- Community member

Another main barrier for all types of newcomers was transportation since there was no public transportation available for them to get to places independently. Although not all newcomer groups have been able to receive the same support in this regard, efforts have been made to meet the extraordinary needs of Syrian families. Community groups and individuals have volunteered their time to help newcomers with transportation, translation, and facilitating activities for refugee children. Forming strong social networks also proved to be important for overcoming transportation barriers, as newcomers could potentially carpool with community members. Several participants mentioned how they were able to connect newcomers with others to carpool, allowing them to attend important ESL classes or to get to their work shifts.

Tensions

Community members reported an absence of a genuine welcoming environment for newcomers. For instance, discrimination experienced by newcomers contributed to an unwelcoming environment. Although these sentiments were not commonly expressed (or at least not overtly), in a few instances, refugee sponsorship group members found themselves having to defend the arrival of newcomers to their peers. County leadership emphasized the lack of community support available for Canadian newcomers relative to immigrant newcomers. It was discussed by a few participants that while the community was quick to mobilize in order to fill service gaps for refugees; the same effort did not exist for Canadians moving from other provinces or regions.

“Were they doing the same thing for someone moving here from, say BC [British Columbia]? No, not at all.”

- County leader

However, it was acknowledged that immigrant newcomers were likely to require additional support to adapt to an entirely new culture, environment, and public system.

County leadership and some newcomers highlighted the discrepancy in support for non-visible newcomers, given that they blend in to the community and can pass unnoticed and unsupported. Some non-immigrant newcomers stated that they felt isolated and neglected by the community. Sponsor and church groups were seen as great sources of support and engagement in the community. Many newcomers who were not refugees felt the community did not offer similar networks to them. However, it should be noted that service providers and county leaders believe that, in general, rural people tend to be more independent and rely primarily on social contacts than on service organizations for support. They identified that service organizations and other formal forms of support are mostly used by immigrants and refugees according to the degree of their needs.

Overall, community members felt that the average newcomer was somewhat disconnected in Huron County. Strong emotional support came from personal connections with friends, family, and colleagues. Those who arrived to Huron County and did not form community connections had a much more difficult time integrating. Participating in clubs, faith groups, and community organizations provided an avenue through which newcomers could socialize and form friendships. However, newcomers also emphasized the difficulty in locating community groups and staying informed regarding ongoing local activities. Some even noted that they knew of no community groups or clubs outside of the YMCA.

Professional services in health, education, and employment were particularly helpful in the integration process. However, some community members noted how these services were geared mostly towards immigrant newcomers and not those from other provinces or elsewhere who may experience integration barriers as well. These barriers, especially those related to feelings of disconnectedness, may contribute to the relocation of newcomers from Huron County. This is supported by low retention rates in the area. Community members felt that this has a negative impact on the labour market which they perceived to be dependent on newcomers in the long-term.

NEWCOMER EXPERIENCES IN HURON COUNTY

Having discussed the supports and social capital available to newcomers in Huron County, we sought to understand its impacts on the experiences of newcomers in Huron County. We were interested in learning if they had strong supports and how they have been able to leverage their networks to get settled in the community. Our study was premised on the assumption that social supports and engagement play a key role in creating a positive experience for newcomers in rural communities. As such, we consulted with community members, service providers, and county leaders to gain a sense of how they perceived that newcomers were supported and engaged in their County. Similarly, we asked newcomers about their experience of moving to Huron County. The following section outlines the responses given by each stakeholder group.

Community

In general, community members considered the average newcomer to be highly or somewhat disconnected upon settling into the community. Faith groups and community organizations were the main avenue through which newcomers could form connections, though a lack of language and transportation posed some barriers. Faith groups were particularly active in the sponsorship of refugees in Huron County. However, newcomers that did not practice religion, or who were more introverted, had greater difficulty in integrating into the community.

Leadership

The county leadership in Huron County recognized that immigrant newcomers are likely to face a more difficult transition period than regional newcomers who are already able to understand and navigate the systems of another province, for example. While services and supports existed, there was always room for improvement. Diversity was considered to be an asset to the future of the community. Social networks were difficult to penetrate for newcomers, especially considering that most generations have lived in the county for three or four generations. More newcomers would help to invigorate the community and bring a variety of new perspectives, skills, and businesses. Events like the multicultural festival and showcases in museums helped highlight the diversification that newcomers brought to the community.

Community email updates (called “email bursts”) were a method employed by one municipality to keep newcomers informed. Participants also discussed that more information could be provided on municipal websites.

Newcomers

Some newcomers reported a very welcoming environment and feeling highly connected, while others felt highly disconnected and that the community was less welcoming. All newcomers noted that the level of connectedness depended on the ability of the person to socialize and initiate relationship building. Community members were described as kind, but not necessarily open or welcoming.

“In our experience with working with newcomers in several programs we have and in research, we continue to affirm even though communities are nice, when people can’t quite seem to break the barrier, we won’t be able to retain people.”

- Service provider

The library and sports community groups hosted activities that allowed newcomers to participate and meet new people. Newcomers from abroad (Europe, Syria, Sudan, and Indonesia) reported more difficulties in adjusting, even though privately sponsored refugees received vigorous support in their first year in Canada. The costs of living and transportation were cited as major barriers to integration for many newcomers.

Service Providers

Newcomers rely on a wide variety of service providers, the most prominent being those related to employment, business, housing, education, and language. Language training for immigrants is especially important, while employment services are important for all newcomers since many reported relying on the social support and information provided by professional colleagues.

“It was challenging to figure what was available and what where, struggled to figure out – only when I started working, I learned about available supports in the community.”

- Newcomer

The library remains a hub of activity in initial integration. Librarians meet many newcomers and are able to provide welcome information as well as referrals to professional services. Service providers admitted that providing sufficient service support for immigrant newcomers was challenging in rural communities, and that the cost of services was an important factor. While the municipal government may be focused on newcomer attraction, the quality and effectiveness of service providers allow for newcomer retention

“I think sometimes people in rural communities assume that, just because they’re able to attract somebody into the community, they are going to be successful. That’s not always the case. They want to be self-sufficient and can’t. Ultimately those are the kind of people that are not going to settle there, because they do need support services but they are not available. I think communities need to be really mindful of what exactly they have in their community.”

- Service provider

Discussions with stakeholder groups in Huron County revealed the various ways by which newcomers were afforded social supports in the community. Targeted efforts have been made to address newcomer challenges in accessing services and resources which provide newcomers with much-needed support. However, it is evident that there are still areas that are lacking in development. Further strategies need to be developed in order to ensure that all newcomer needs are met, including providing resources that facilitate the building of social capital. The lessons learned from Huron County’s successes and growth edges will be examined in the summation of this report, where recommendations and evidence of best practices will also be presented to help address the remaining issues revealed in the findings.

NEWCOMER SOCIAL CAPITAL CONTRIBUTIONS

While community members have the capacity to increase newcomer social capital, newcomers themselves also have networks, resources, and assets that can contribute to the community. In determining the social capital contributions of newcomers in the community, we first asked community members, service providers, and county leaders for their perspectives on newcomer contributions. We then asked newcomers to share their thoughts on how they believe they have contributed to the community. Discussions with these various stakeholder groups revealed the immense benefit of newcomer engagement and the numerous ways by which newcomers add value to their community. Newcomer contributions highlighted by community members in Huron County are discussed below.

Diversity

Culture

Newcomers were recognized by community members and county leaders as innovative, bringing in new ideas and much-needed perspectives that helped the community grow. Participants felt that newcomers helped build the community by growing the population and infusing diversity into events, cuisine, and town life. Some organizations, like libraries and museums, hosted events to showcase the social capital brought by newcomers to teach community residents about different cultures and skills. These events provided opportunities for community members to meet newcomers. Newcomers themselves felt that they had a lot to offer to their communities, and were grateful for community members and employers who were welcoming and helped them access opportunities.

Greater diversity was also mentioned as a factor for improving newcomer retention. In one municipality, for example, a small group of Filipinos had settled into the community. Despite the lack of their local cuisine or cultural organization, the relationships formed between the group and other members of the community aided them in feeling connected and part of the community.

“I’m a big supporter of diversity. No matter where they come from... and again I point to the fact that 75% of the people who live here have been here for three generations or more. So I think there is insane value in newcomers that come here saying “What about this way?” Just providing that different perspective, that external perspective, that in a culture like our rural culture that tends to be very tight knit and multigenerational, there’s great value in that.”

- County leadership

Engagement and Effective Participation

Newcomers were actively involved as volunteers in the community, supporting schools, clubs, and civic projects. Service providers stated that newcomers were also more likely to organize events and start organizations, creating community or cultural hubs. Newcomers were commended for seeking out new connections and volunteer opportunities, contributing their time and resources to the community.

Newcomers described their experience volunteering, as well as their efforts participating in social clubs, faith communities, and other groups as positive contributions to the community. Common areas of volunteering include schools, hospitals, service clubs and local events.

To better understand effective newcomer participation, we asked county leadership and service providers if any methods were being used to track newcomer participation and contributions. County leadership members mentioned that they do not have the appropriate methods to go and identify newcomers.

However, they are able to track participation levels events that are happening in the community. They suggested that it might be possible to create new tools on their website such as a drop-down box for newcomers to register for emails which might offer some indication of newcomer activity.

Most service providers reported that they do not have the resources to proactively track newcomers. However, some service providers discussed that they do track people attending their programs, but only generally in terms of numbers. For some organizations, tracking newcomer participation and contributions would not be a part of their mandate. Consequently, they would not find it purposeful to track such activities.

Economic

Skills

Service providers also emphasized the economic and civic contributions of newcomers. They noted the diverse skills that they brought with them that supported business development and job creation.

“They’ve come in with skills — we need skilled workers. There are some very well-educated ones. Some start businesses, hire local people. I don’t know what our small downtowns would do without new Canadians or 1st generation new Canadians. They are a ‘merchant class’. That’s significant in so many ways.”

- Service provider

Employment

Community members noted the economic impact of newcomers who often were employed in entry-level job positions that are chronically unfilled. Newcomers also opened businesses that stimulate the economy. One participant recalled that a newcomer who was a visible minority moved specifically to Huron County to open a business.

Newcomer-to-Newcomer Support

In addition to volunteering in various capacities in the community, newcomers tended to be more aware of other newcomers and the difficulties they face. They were also more likely to be welcoming and to reach out to new arrivals. One newcomer described helping a family from Africa settle into the municipality. These types of interactions helped to create a more inclusive, diverse, and welcoming environment for future newcomers.

“Being a newcomer, I’ve tried to be more aware of other newcomers and take on the role of the person who’s been there the longest take the first step to offer information and support to people. I’ve done that and directed people to resources.”

- Newcomer

Promoting inclusion and extending support to other new members of the community was recognized as an important endeavour, and the efforts taken to participate in this task were able to increase and strengthen newcomer engagement.

It is evident that newcomers are engaged and active members of their community. The presence of newcomers in Huron County has enriched the community through the sharing of different cultures, active civil engagement, and the production of economic activity. Most importantly, newcomers act as enablers for the engagement of other newcomers. There remain challenges, such as the need to increase community inclusion for newcomers and connecting them with community activities that promote the building of their social networks. Addressing these concerns will help Huron County attract and retain newcomers who contribute immensely to community growth and development in Huron County, benefiting all those who live in the area.

BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences in Huron County have illustrated the importance of newcomer engagement in rural communities and the value of social capital in creating positive experiences for newcomers. When newcomers are able to build social capital, they are able to build increased connections to their community, networks, and supports. Developing and providing opportunities to develop social capital through supports and services is crucial to foster social inclusion among newcomers. Huron County has been able to assist newcomers as evidenced in the following best practices.

Recommendations are offered in this section to address the remaining challenges experienced by newcomers in Huron County. We attempt to reflect on how best to move forward, highlighting effective strategies and useful considerations for the future. Recommendations and best practices have been presented by each stakeholder group to offer suggestions as to how each group can best respond to the difficulties still faced by newcomers in their community.

Community

Best Practices

- Neighbours, classmates, and volunteers helped newcomers navigate the system and made referrals when required.
- Many community members took ownership in helping refugee families through councils, churches and other groups.
- Church groups and community service groups played a vital role in welcoming newcomers and supporting their needs. Organizing multicultural events increased participation of both newcomers and service providers.
- Newspaper advertisement of events and activities.
- Community members and leaders were very welcoming, and embraced the diversity that newcomers brought into the community.

Recommendations

- Find more ways to incorporate newcomers into the community and increase inclusiveness. This could be done by creating more volunteer engagement opportunities. Participants discussed a desire for the community to come together more often, to invite newcomers to celebrations, and to be mindful of those who do not have family members in the area.
- Improve communication strategies to ensure that there is more promotion of community engagement opportunities, services, and supports. Newcomers discussed the lack of exposure and outreach as a main barrier to integration. A suggested strategy to communicate with immigrant newcomers is to share information in language training facilities.
- Find natural community spaces where people can connect at a deeper level in order to decrease isolation.

- Organize all-season activities to increase face-to-face interaction and create a sense of welcoming.
- (Re)Introducing community greeters. For example, “The Goderich Greeter” was an initiative that aimed to introduce newcomers to various businesses. The initiative is no longer in operation although it remains advertised on the County’s website.

Leaders

Best Practices

- Focused on diversity as an asset in the community, especially since it is very tight-knit community.
- County leaders brought people together and provided support in order to ease the transition process for the newcomers.
- Online tools provided by the county have been very informative and helpful to retrieve documents, services, and supports for newcomers. The “Invest in Huron” and “Make Huron Home” websites provided comprehensive information on starting a business and/or moving to Huron County. In rural communities, providing up-to-date resources for prospective newcomers is key in terms of community branding and marketing.
- Through the commission of county studies, they included newcomer attraction to the medium-long term planning of the development of the county. They also applied for grants such as the Canada 150 Partnership Proposal “Promoting Youth Inclusion in Rural Labour Markets” and the Communities in Transition Fund.
- County staff provided active resources for networking. They partnered with local groups but also universities and organizations from larger cities such as Toronto to promote Huron County as a place for new graduates and business start-ups. This was a hands-on and potentially effective method of attracting youth from the city into the county.

Recommendations

- Increase support for service clubs where people can get involved and meet others.
- Engage in newcomer projects over the years in order to identify and fill gaps in the system with particular focus on non-visible newcomers.
- Promote the Ontario 211 service to newcomers to help them obtain information about community services and general information.
- Enhance coordination among community organizations, service providers, and county leaders to have shared knowledge of available resources. A centralized service point, a “one-stop-shop,” would be useful to get all the required information and referrals.
- Offer supports and alternatives to address transportation barriers (for example: a community carpool board where people can list their schedules and others can sign up)
- Create a playground or green space for children. This could serve as an effective way to get parents and children connected.
- Address discrimination in the county through initiatives that promote awareness of different cultures in the community. Immigrants and refugees were said to sometimes face discrimination and racial slurs.

Newcomers

Best practices

- Newcomers actively participated in the community through volunteering in schools and other community organizations, as well as through attendance at community events.
- Newcomer initiative in organizing and creating organizations and events that continued to add to the overall social capital of the community.

Recommendations

- Increase efforts to connect personally and build relationships with the community.
- Offer guidance and support to other newcomers. This is particularly important for those newcomers who are already established in the community.
- Non-visible newcomers, such as retirees, youth, and newcomers from other areas of Canada, would benefit from connecting with service agencies and community groups to discover opportunities that are also available to them.

Service Providers

Best Practices

- Provided a wide range of services for immigrant newcomers that helped them overcome barriers such as language, lack of housing, transportation, employment, etc.
- Services, workshops, and activities organized by service providers often nurtured spaces for social connections. Many newcomers mentioned that they were able to make friends and build relationships through participation in various service agencies.
- The Employment and Learning Centre has been a particular key player in building social capital with and for newcomers through professional connections, emotional support, guidance and encouragement. They also provided or connected residents and newcomers with ESL classes, language classes, skills updating, online courses, and employment counselling. These services were extremely important since job retention is an important factor in newcomer retention.
- Service providers such as The Centre for Employment and Learning have been exemplary in adapting to current needs. For example, with the influx of Syrian newcomers, the Centre began offering specialized one-on-one counselling with an Arabic-speaking settlement counsellor in Exeter (Huron Local Immigration Partnership, 2015).
- Community engagement and integration opportunities such as Bayfield Library's Coffee and Conversation group.

- Service provider and community groups' collaboration on common goals. This has been particularly strong since the Syrian refugee crisis. While the Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron (MAPH), a project of the United Way Perth-Huron, and its sub-committees (the Perth-Huron Settlement Services Working Committee and the Cultural Awareness Committee of Perth-Huron) have always provided important resources for newcomers, church and private sponsorship groups have made an important contribution to bringing newcomers into the County. These two groups support each other, as sponsored refugees benefit greatly from the initiatives of MAPH (United Way Perth, 2015).
- United Way Perth-Huron has also been an important actor in funding newcomer-specific research, such as the 2015 Newcomer Outreach and Needs Assessment Project (NONA). They also collaborate with a leadership and service groups to ensure that the needs of newcomers are met in terms of ESL classes, Arabic crash courses, etc. (Ibid).
- The sponsorship of refugees has also helped bring the community together through social media, newcomer welcoming events, and more. Rural communities are often physically segregated and online resources became an important way for people to know about newcomers and how they could help with their integration.

Recommendations

- Community bulletin board to strengthen newcomers' awareness of events and organizations available in the area.
- Ensure follow-up after giving referrals in order to make the process more successful.
- Establish orientation and tour programs to guide newcomers in terms of municipal rules, such as how the garbage system works, or to show them around the closest facilities.
- Increase language services for immigrant newcomers and service providers.
- Provide training in non-verbal communication for service providers, sponsorship groups, and other interest groups. This would support both community and immigrant newcomers in navigating changes and cultural boundaries. This has the added benefit of partially addressing the need for translation services in the county.
- One-on-one discussion with a mentor is recommended for newcomers to help them receive advice, as well as acquire more information about community services.
- Allocate specific times and sessions for newcomers to learn about services and system processes.
- Increase promotions and outreach initiatives.
- Create more opportunities to help like-minded individuals connect and interact with one another. Some examples include knitting clubs, coffee and conversation programs, and adult coloring clubs. Offer more inclusive programming for all ages and types of newcomers.

| FINAL THOUGHTS

The aim of this project was to investigate the existing social supports that were available in rural communities, as well as the strategies that have been used to encourage newcomer engagement. Through this study, we were able to gather stakeholder experiences on how community efforts in newcomer participation and engagement have been developed and operationalized within the context of the local environment. Findings revealed important insights regarding the various processes by which newcomers were able to leverage and expand their social capital to access supports in Huron County.

Newcomers play a vital role in the long-term sustainability and growth of Huron County. They bring new skills and open businesses. They volunteer in faith groups, sports groups, clubs, and other community organizations. They also help attract and retain other newcomers. All stakeholders noted that rural communities such as Huron County need to support newcomers as much as possible during their transition of settling into a new community in order to improve retention rates. As such, Huron County continues to work on programs that welcome and integrate newcomers, providing much needed supports such as employment services, language classes, and other services that help newcomers settle into the community.

As more newcomers will continue move to Huron County in the future, the county will have to think strategically how services can best be adapted to support the variety in newcomer experiences. Thinking about these services in the context of social capital provides a unique and important lens through which to understand the challenges that newcomers face. Social capital greatly depends on the development of meaningful community connections. Challenges related to basic needs such as costs of living, language skills, and lack of transportation debilitate opportunities for social connectivity. Dedicated efforts to address these issues will enhance the social capital of newcomers, ultimately promoting the growth and vitality of the whole community.



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I APPENDIX I – METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Focus Groups	16
Interviews conducted in-person in the community or by telephone	21
Online survey available upon request	2
TOTAL:	39

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Newcomers	Focus Group	13
	Interviews (phone & in-person)	5
	Online Surveys	1
	TOTAL:	19
Community Members	Focus Group	3
	Interviews (phone & in-person)	5
	Online Surveys	1
	TOTAL:	9
County Leadership	Focus Group	0
	Interviews (phone & in-person)	2
	Online Surveys	0
	TOTAL:	2
Service Providers	Focus Group	0
	Interviews (phone & in-person)	9
	Online Surveys	0
	TOTAL:	9

APPENDIX II – HURON COUNTY: ADDITIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL RESOURCES

This section details the operational processes evident in Huron County through an examination of various documents, including meeting minutes, project planning records, Municipal Council minutes, media releases, and news articles. It highlights details of existing community initiatives and evaluates impacts on newcomer social capital.

Community

Who?

- Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron (MAPH - a project of United Way Perth-Huron)
- Churches
- Refugee Sponsorship Groups
- Cultural Awareness Committee of Perth-Huron
- Huron Local Immigration Partnership
- Perth-Huron Settlement Services Working Committee

What Are They Doing?

- Strong push to sponsor refugee families through private, church sponsorships
- Connect newcomers with available services
- Newcomer studies

How Are They Doing It?

- Utilizing online tools for collaboration
 - Creation of FB groups to advertise events specific to welcoming refugees, volunteers, help in providing basic necessities, support, etc.
- Collaborating with various organizations (leadership, services) to ensure that the needs of sponsored families are met (i.e. ESL classes, Make Huron Home Newsletter often promoting MAPH news, Arabic crash courses)
- Newcomer-Specific Research
 - 2015 Newcomer Outreach and Needs Assessment Project (NONA) funded by the United Way Perth-Huron

Impacts on Social Capital

- Bringing rural communities together online in the planning/integration stage of refugee sponsorship, as well as in person via church and community events
- Huge rally for volunteers and community involvement

- Main actors, namely Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron via the United Way, provide immensely valuable social capital for newcomers, particularly immigrants
 - o Beyond immigrants/refugees, there is a lack of support/effort for other kinds of newcomers
- Perth-Huron partnerships bring immense benefits to both counties, where they would be ineffective or lack clients on their own

Leadership

Who?

- Huron County municipal government i.e. HC Planning and Development Department, Economic Development Board, Tourism, community boards

What Are They Doing?

- Strategic planning to attract newcomers
- Networking at events to promote rural living and attract Millennials/newcomers
- Partnering with local organizations, universities, and other counties to attract newcomers
- Funding programs that support newcomers and new businesses

How Are They Doing It?

- Commissioning studies and planning reports
 - o The commissioning of studies and 5-year plans that, while they may not address newcomers exclusively, address immigration and newcomer attraction as an intersection with broader themes of agricultural or town development (i.e. South Huron Economic Development Strategic Plan 2016-2020; Huron County Business Expansion and Retention Report)
- Applying for grants and programmes
 - o Grants i.e. Canada 150 Partnership Proposal “Promoting Youth Inclusion in Rural Labour Markets” was submitted for \$89,000. The project is a mixture of research and skill-building workshops for youth and employers, with the goal of improving the labour market integration of Millennials in rural areas, and consideration of the Communities in Transition Fund to support the manufacturing sector in Wellington
- Networking
 - o Planning events (i.e. potential Engineering in Wellington County event) and attending job fairs, partnering with universities to place students in counties for job experiences
- Improving online tools and community connectivity
 - o Make Huron Home website, launched in 2012, is a “go-to” information destination for anyone thinking about moving to Huron County
 - o Releases a seasonal newsletter geared towards community events, progress for newcomers, and features prominent newcomers

Impacts on Social Capital

- Leadership is responsible for developing effective “first points of contact” for potential newcomers — it is through the above-mentioned initiatives (such as access to the Make Huron Home portal, university/employment programs and fairs, and grant projects specifically to attract business and newcomers) that people first consider moving to Huron County

- Online tools help spotlight contributions of newcomers and showcase an active/welcoming community. In a way, it's marketing or branding of the county/township. A concerted effort should be made to keep all online information up-to-date. For example, the Goderich Greeter, an interesting concept meant to introduce newcomers to various businesses, is no longer in operation yet is still advertised on their website. This can also create confusion for service providers trying to connect newcomers with advertised services.

Newcomer

Who?

- Syrian refugees (main focus of country initiatives)
- Other newcomers

What Are They Doing?

- Supporting other newcomers in the community
- Sharing experiences and stories

How Are They Doing It?

- Online and public resources
 - Participating in R2R conferences, studies, interviews, newsletters highlighting their contributions
- Volunteering/Working
 - Position for newcomer as a settlement counsellor, for example, and volunteering with MAPH
- Social Support
 - Syrian families across townships/counties being connected to each other for support

Impacts on Social Capital

- Diversifying the community, reshaping community identity
- Helping to retain other newcomers if there is sufficient social support
- Creation of community/cultural hubs
- Contributing to economic development, bringing new skills (i.e. cooking, language, other)
- Most focus is on immigrants as newcomers, and not contributions in social capital of retirees, newcomers from other countries, etc.

Services

Overall Types of Services

- Employment
- Business Development
- Education
- Settlement Services

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Who?

- Centre for Employment and Learning of Avon Maitland

What Are They Doing?

- Helping newcomers and residents find work, update their skills, and training

How Are They Doing It?

- Provision of programs and services
 - i.e. appointments with employment counsellors, online and in-person training courses
 - ESL classes
- Connecting people to schools and courses

Impacts on Social Capital

- Providing people with employment and skills (including language skills) helps retain newcomers who arrive in the county

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Who?

- Invest in Huron Economic Development Services

What Are They Doing?

- Supporting local businesses – little that is specialized for newcomers

How Are They Doing It?

- Providing easy to access online tools
 - Databases for property searches and investment opportunities
- Connection with other organizations
 - Such as the Huron Business Development Corporation and the Huron Small Business Enterprise Centre
- Administering grants to help local businesses
- Studies on the economic environment and areas for improvement to attract and retain business

Impacts on Social Capital

- Businesses are hubs for community development and people getting to know each other. They also provide an avenue for newcomers to establish themselves in the community. It is difficult for business associations to support existing local businesses, let alone new ones. There are also little resources specific to newcomers.
- Invest in Huron is closely linked to Make Huron Home, which wisely ties business and newcomer attraction together

EDUCATION SERVICES

Who?

- Centre for Employment and Learning of Avon Maitland
- Avon Maitland Schools Canada

What Are They Doing?

- Helping newcomers and residents find work, update their skills, and training
- Attracting newcomers
- Promoting multiculturalism

How Are They Doing It?

- ESL classes
- Support in foreign languages like French, Spanish, and Portuguese
- International student exchange programs

Impacts on Social Capital

- Exposing rural students to other cultures while bringing people from other cultures and teaching them about rural Ontario, potentially encouraging them to immigrate
- Creating a more welcoming, diverse community
- Supporting minority languages and cultures

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Who?

- Centre for Employment and Learning of Avon Maitland

What Are They Doing?

- Providing settlement services

How Are They Doing It?

- Appointments with a specialized settlement counsellor who was a newcomer from Iraq (established in 2015), in Stratford and Exeter

Impacts on Social Capital

- Support for newcomers, perhaps in direct response to Syrian sponsorship, as the counsellor is from the Middle East and can speak Arabic
- County effort to provide specialized, professional support for immigrants, beyond personal and community connections





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