



Measuring
Rural Community
Vitality

Newcomer Engagement and Social Capital in Rural Communities



SPOTLIGHT ON
**NORTHUMBERLAND
COUNTY**

April 30, 2017



RURAL ONTARIO
INSTITUTE



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| COUNTY OVERVIEW | 4 |
| Strengths | 5 |
| Barriers..... | 5 |
| SOCIAL CAPITAL ASSESSMENT OF COUNTY..... | 6 |
| Personal Relationships: The Foundation for Strong Social Capital Systems | 6 |
| Leadership | 8 |
| Online Resources..... | 9 |
| Social Services | 9 |
| Immigrant Newcomer Supports | 10 |
| NEWCOMER EXPERIENCES IN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY..... | 12 |
| Community..... | 12 |
| Leadership | 13 |
| Newcomers | 13 |
| Service Providers | 14 |
| NEWCOMER SOCIAL CAPITAL CONTRIBUTIONS..... | 15 |
| Diversity | 15 |
| Engagement and Effective Participation | 16 |
| Economic | 17 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS & BEST PRACTICES..... | 18 |
| Community..... | 18 |
| Leadership | 19 |
| Newcomers | 20 |
| Service Providers | 21 |
| FINAL THOUGHTS..... | 22 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 24 |
| APPENDIX I – METHODOLOGY | 27 |
| APPENDIX II – NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY: | |
| Additional Social Capital Resources | 28 |



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 Huron County, and companion YouTube video links are available at www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

| COUNTY OVERVIEW

Northumberland County is a vibrant region situated on the north shore of Lake Ontario, in central Ontario. The county comprises seven diverse municipalities: The Township of Alnwich/Haldimand, the Municipality of Brighton, the Town of Cobourg, the Township of Cramahe, the Township of Hamilton, the Municipality of Port Hope, and the Municipality of Trent Hills.

Northumberland offers a range of living experiences from historic towns, to scenic rural areas, to water settings on Rice Lake, the Trent River and Lake Ontario (Northumberland County, 2015). The municipalities of Northumberland County have a combined population of 85,390 residents, a number that has grown from 77,500 in 2001 (Northumberland County, 2013). These communities range in size and offer a multitude of services and amenities. Easy-access health care, a low crime rate, and educational facilities make Northumberland an ideal area for families looking for an alternative lifestyle from the urban metropolises. As such, it is no surprise that Northumberland has experienced consistent and steady population growth with newcomers coming from all over. Eight-one percent of the county's population is of working age (15+), making Northumberland's percentage of working bodies higher than both Ontario's and Canada's (Ibid). This is a particular asset for those seeking work in Northumberland's main industries: agribusiness, construction, and manufacturing (Ibid). In combination with its own population and the over 1 million people living within a 30-minute radius, Northumberland County has major potential for business growth. With its low cost of living, low unemployment rate, and easy access to Canada's largest toll-free highway, Northumberland is the ideal place for many newcomers.

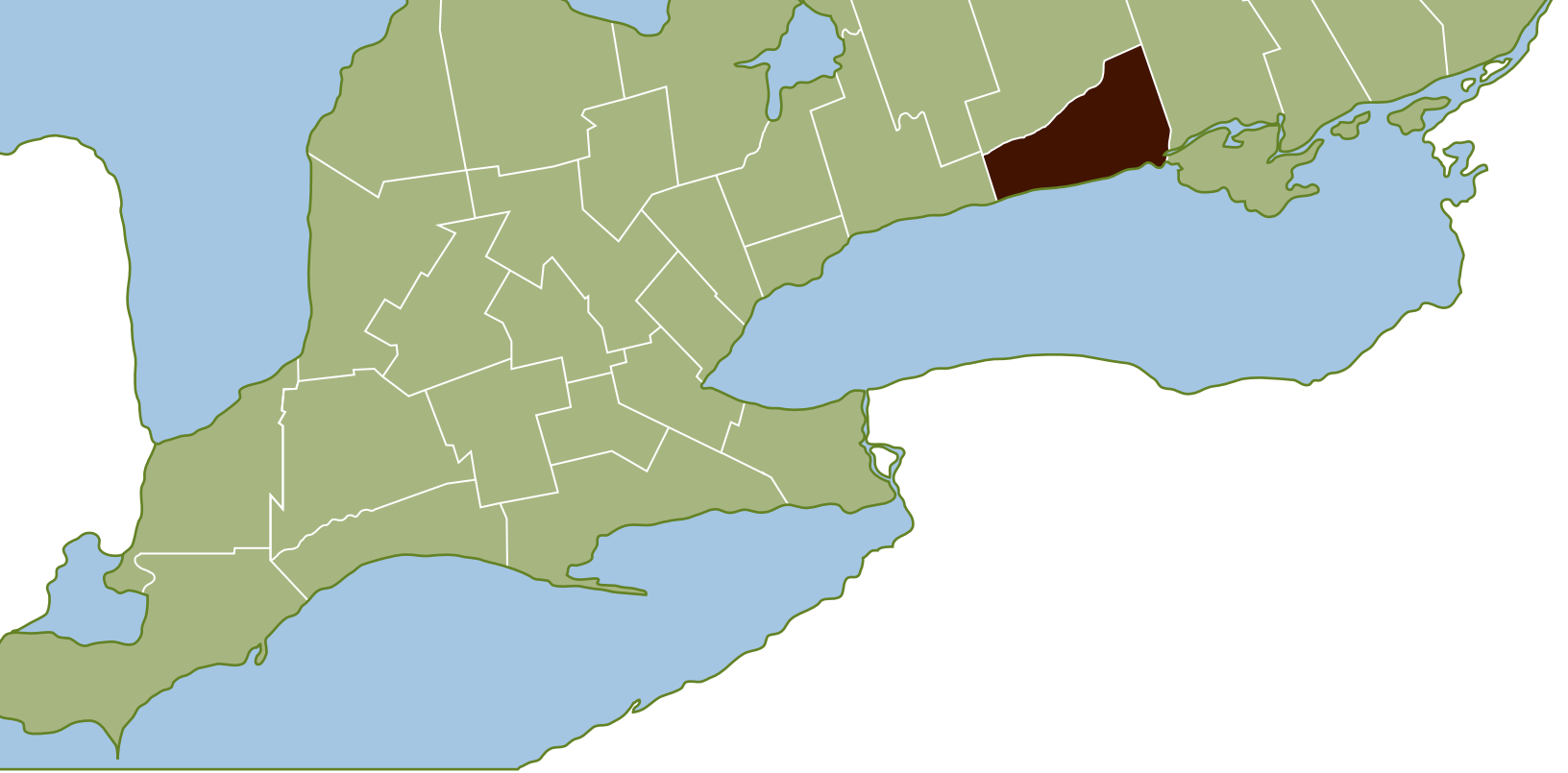
Given the many assets found in this County, newcomer engagement and support is key for attracting and retaining people seeking to relocate to one of its many wonderful communities. Newcomer participation in local communities is an important mechanism for facilitating community development, strengthening local growth, and building social capital. This case study forms part of a study evaluating the role of newcomer engagement by conducting interviews with community members, leaders, newcomers and service providers in Dufferin County, Huron County, and Northumberland County. These stakeholders 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 sixty-six participants in Northumberland County through telephone interviews, in-person interviews, and one focus group through the New Canadians Centre.

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 case study showcases what we heard about newcomer experiences in Northumberland County, including social capital resources available, newcomer contributions, as well as best practices and recommendations given by participants. 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.

We recognize the uniqueness in resources and assets in each County. Acknowledging that social support and engagement would vary depending on the context and infrastructure of each community.

Some of the strengths and barriers for enhancing social capital in Northumberland County include:



Strengths

- Intentional leadership by county leaders to support and engage newcomers. This is seen imbedded in the county's strategic plan and in praxis through active financial, professional and social support towards individuals and groups supporting newcomers in the county
- Organized and insightful online tools to facilitate newcomer navigation of the county (e.g. www.welcometonorthumberland.ca; www.fourinfo.com)
- Purposeful civic engagement of newcomers by county leaders, service providers and established newcomers. These include strong, well-established newcomer groups (New Canadians Centre, Northumberland Hispanic Cultural Club, Northumberland Newcomers Network, etc.), as well as other associations, networks, and municipal task forces
- Northumberland County is recognized by many as a rural leader in providing community transportation
- Friendly and supportive neighbours

Barriers

- Despite having low unemployment rates, the opportunities offered are primarily within the agribusiness, construction, and manufacturing industries. Skilled newcomers have found limited employment opportunities and reported feeling underemployed
- While recognized as a leader in rural transportation, there is room for enhancement. This is particularly relevant for newcomers upon first arrival who may not have immediate access to private transportation
- Limited infrastructure for urban-to-rural migrants seeking commodities such as high-speed internet. This was acknowledged as a limitation by both community members and county leaders, while recognizing this is part of the transition to a rural setting
- Newcomer information not well advertised upon arrival. Many newcomers unsure of where to find initial information and connections.
- Immigrant newcomers from countries where English is not the first language have faced significant language barriers when looking for employment. This has also impacted the way in which they make connections with others in their community.

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 – Northumberland County: Additional Social Capital Resources for a comprehensive literature review of other social capital resources.

Personal Relationships: The Foundation for Strong Social Capital Systems

The top answer given by all stakeholders in terms of the most effective social capital resource for newcomers was personal relationship. Personal relationships though simple have the potential to majorly impact the way in which newcomers integrate and connect in a community. From the consultation, many newcomers stated that their initial method for socializing in the community was by getting involved in committees and engaging in extracurricular activities. Joining clubs such as yoga, cycling groups, or the Brighton Dragon Boat club were effective ways discussed to meet new people and stay connected to the community. While most newcomers used resources provided by the community, some relied on their families and friends for support.

“Newcomers find out through word of mouth, from neighbours, through passing, what’s going on, what they’re doing.”

- Community member

Neighbours

Neighbours played a vital role in supporting newcomers during their first year of living in Northumberland. Not only did they help newcomers navigate the system, but they also offered friendly gestures such as picking up the mail when newcomers in the community went on vacation. This was very well-received by all newcomers and urban-to-rural migrants in particular. One of the county leaders interviewed discussed how the importance of neighbours is often a learning curve for those moving to a rural setting for the first time where neighbours become a life line. Emphasis was made on the asset of neighbours as key holders of social capital within the community. This tight-knit characteristic of rural communities was not always seen as ideal by some newcomers who felt that there was a lack of privacy precisely because of how connected everyone is. However, the benefits of having supported neighbours outweighed their discomfort.

Community Groups, Churches and Recreational Activities

Various community groups were discussed as being great social capital resources for newcomers in Northumberland County. Community groups participated in formally welcoming newcomers through socials, festivals and welcoming activities. Welcoming events were a great way to bring awareness to newcomers about what was currently available in the community. **The New Canadians Centre** were discussed as key players in hosting cultural exchange events to introduce newcomers to traditional Canadian activities and customs. They also hosted information events bringing various service providers together to assist newcomers in navigating the community and access the resources needed. The Northumberland Hispanic Cultural Club was also highlighted for its social activities that have allowed community members to meet newcomers and learn about different cultures. Overall, it was said that

Northumberland County does not fall short of civic engagement opportunities. These activities have been effective in enhancing newcomers' circle of friendships, reduce isolation, improve mental health, and allow them to integrate in healthy ways.

Many opportunities for civic engagement were also developed through participation in committees, boards, community events, and client invitations. Despite the many community engagement opportunities available in the county, it was also noted that these are limited for either families with children or older demographics. The 20-to-25-year-old cohort was said to have limited social opportunities to meet people their age. This was particularly harder for newcomers in that cohort who found retention and engagement an area in need of further support.

“Pretty quiet for my demographic – 20-25, not many young adults. Some but not so many. Most young adults here travel outside of Cobourg, they go to Toronto or Montreal on the weekends.”

- Newcomer

Recreational activities such as fitness, curling, fishing, hockey, and art in the community were also ways in which newcomers participated in the community. They offered an excellent platform for people to get together and share their stories.

Churches

Churches were another effective support system available to newcomers. Having networks within faith communities or participating in a parish was particularly beneficial for newcomer integration. Churches often provided physical spaces for newcomers to congregate for various activities such as English language classes. These groups were a source of transportation, information, and relationships. Churches were some of the major supports for immigrant newcomers, particularly Syrian newcomers that arrived to the county through sponsorship groups. Other types of newcomers did not rely as much on churches as a source of support unless they were active church-goers.

Professional Groups

Some community members indicated that newcomers received support from their professional networks. In many cases, newcomers migrating for employment purposes said that their colleagues were their primary source of information and connection to the broader community. The business community was also helpful in providing insights into the structure of the downtown core and local Chamber of Commerce. Local businesses and the Employment Centre were mentioned as strong community supports due to their exceptional hospitality. The Chamber of Commerce was particularly highlighted as an important source of information and support for newcomers interested in opening a business in the county.

Other Newcomers

Northumberland County provided newcomer-to-newcomer support networks that allowed individuals to share experiences with other newcomers. The creation of organizations such as the **Northumberland Hispanic Cultural Club** and the **Northumberland Newcomers Network** offered newcomers opportunities to form relationships with other individuals who had similar life experiences. Group members from these groups discussed the social and professional struggles they also experienced as having been newcomers previously. Having been aware of these challenges, these established 'newcomers' organized themselves to support those who had recently arrived, helping newcomers make connections as well as providing them with referrals to services and events. These established 'newcomers' have been discussed as major sources of support by the newcomers in our study, especially during the transition period.

Leadership

Community members highlighted county leadership for its role in the development of the **Northumberland Newcomers Network and the Newcomer Loan**. Similarly, cultural groups received significant encouragement from the county to continue their activities and to grow their memberships. These initiatives were part of a greater economic strategy to reach out to newcomers through civic engagement. Overall, the county made intentional efforts to welcome and support newcomers. For example, all newcomers received a welcome package from the municipal office that included a resource guide, directions, and information on available community services. The county was also actively responsive to the needs of newcomers. For instance, the county implemented English language classes to support the increase in refugee newcomers. County officials discussed the benefits of these targeted strategies, helping to diversify and increase their populations.

“Community integration and economic integration has been a legitimate municipal duty.”

- Community member

County leadership highlighted a range of services available to newcomers upon arrival including health, education, and social services. They also discussed their coordination and cooperation with various organizations to support newcomers. For instance, the county worked with employment agencies, faith groups, and social clubs to welcome newcomers and refer newcomers to relevant groups and services. The municipal government also assisted in this effort by sending people in the right direction, offering information for newcomers who were interested in opening a business or might benefit from information about grants available.

“Municipal government, pointing me in the right direction, especially with opening a business. They held our hand, helped us with grant money. They were the main one, no one else, and we were so focused on our business that we were on sustenance mode, we put off socialization and things like that.”

- Newcomer

County leaders were commended for their intentional leadership in supporting newcomers. They were applauded for their support to newcomers through welcome packages (including guides on services and resources), the Northumberland Newcomers Network (supported by a paid county staff member), **Multicultural Radio**, the Welcome to **Northumberland Online Portal**, and the Newcomer Loan. The latter initiative is a growing fund that aims to get community members and newcomers involved with philanthropy. In addition, county officials provided support to cultural groups by attending their events and encouraging a range of activities in the community. County leadership has also been much-admired for its partnerships with organizations and employment agencies that support newcomers (e.g. helping to make ESL available). County leaders saw their role as part of a coordinated effort that helped to bring services to the community that are useful, without replicating what community groups and service agencies were doing in the community. These intentional efforts to support newcomers were attributed to the county’s commitment to the economic strategy of reaching out to newcomers. One of our participants highlighted that:

“Community and economic integration have been a legitimate municipal duty. The county has identified and embraced this.”

- Community member

Online Resources

Online tools, such as the Newcomer Portal, played a significant role in supporting newcomers prior to their arrival. Newcomers found this system useful when deciding to make the move or recommending the county to family and friends. The **Ontario 211** service helps newcomers access a wide range of information, including housing, hospital, and community resource centre information.

Notably, county leadership members underscored the immense benefit of online tools in integrating and supporting newcomers. Firstly, they discussed the usefulness of their newcomer online radio. This was a unique tool which provided opportunities to broadcast music and programming in different languages. In addition, the county created a Welcome to Northumberland portal which serves newcomers. An extensive range of online information for newcomers exists on the Northumberland website. The wide variety in information and services offered online allowed newcomers to find and access supports that were most suited to their needs.

However, county officials noted the challenges involved in bringing newcomers together to provide essential services. Firstly, familiarization can be difficult, since most information is shared by word of mouth. With the absence of networks in the community, the circulation of information was limited. Furthermore, seniors, who comprise 50% of the population, did not necessarily have access to technology to take advantage of the online resources available.

“Familiarization. it’s just the basic need to know. This is often difficult in a small town because information is shared by word of mouth. It’s not easy. You have to ask. It’s a bit more of a responding to what they need.”

- County leader

Social Services

Service providers mentioned some services, such as community resource centres and legal assistance, which were available to newcomers. Similarly, they believed newcomers sought support typically by joining a club or network. However, they indicated that no systematic method existed to support newcomers in Northumberland County. In fact, they acknowledged that although many services or activities were offered through the municipality, many newcomers were not necessarily aware that these supports were available.

Agencies and Services

Most community members described several services and agencies as a source of support for newcomers. For instance, they indicated that newcomers gravitated toward the community centre, the YMCA and the New Canadians Centre for a variety of reasons. These centres provided referral services, employment support, and children’s programs. Most importantly, the New Canadians Centre provided English language classes which were viewed as fundamental for immigrant newcomer integration.

“Language is basic to everything else.”

- Community member

Community resource centres were discussed to help newcomers with employment, joining classes, and getting involved in social events. Recreational activities such as the Rotary Club and curling club were a good place for newcomers to meet new people. Services for seniors were also provided through libraries, churches, and other local groups. In addition, people in rural communities were able to build relationships through the local arts, where people came together to celebrate music, theatre, and visual arts.

“The churches are very good and have a similar mindset [as service providers]. [For example,] the St. John’s church made space for mom and tot group. Some groups hold their meetings there. They also offer their space for community events.”

- County leader

Although county leadership were praised for their efforts in providing resources to support newcomers in the community, it was noted that newcomers face remaining challenges. Wait times in the healthcare system were mentioned as taxing for newcomers.

The county has a community transportation program, which has placed it as a rural leader, however when it comes to newcomer needs there is still further room for improvement. Transportation issues were discussed as a main barrier for newcomers. This is particularly relevant for newcomers upon first arrival who may not have immediate access to private transportation. The inability to travel to locations impeded newcomers’ capacity to access services and programs.

Immigrant Newcomer Supports

The local community offered many forms of social support and resources to newcomers. There were newcomer organizations and settlement services that were focused on connecting immigrant newcomers with other different networks and community members. For example, two medical doctors volunteered to help Syrian families, while schools organized fundraisers for refugees. Many organizations also focused on helping newcomer youth through service clubs and groups.

Newly-arrived immigrants had access to settlement services such as the Northumberland Newcomers Centre and the Immigration Centre for Northumberland. For outsiders moving in, social groups such as Cobourg Friends were helpful in providing opportunities to meet new people from the community. By joining these groups, newcomers learned about the services offered in the community, such as transportation assistance, the mental health clinic, and other forms of personal assistance.

“Thinking of the Syrian family. They received a lot of direct support. i.e., setting up. very well-orchestrated. It’s an interesting thing the questions made me thought about. It was very quietly done. No media hype or in the papers. In some communities they track their experience but that hasn’t happened there.”

- County leader

According to community members, the New Canadians Centre, YMCA, Community Resource Centre, professional networks, and social clubs were among the places where they most frequently met newcomers in their community. Church groups were highlighted as key hubs that assisted newcomers moving into the community and most recently, served as strong supports for Syrian newcomers. Northumberland County also had a strong network of cultural groups and associations that engaged and supported newcomers from different countries, including the New Canadians Centre, the Northumberland Hispanic Cultural Club, and the Brighton Refugee and Immigrant Needs Group (BRING).

Recognizing the different and greater needs of immigrant newcomers, respondents shared how this population was welcomed and supported in the community as they navigated rural life in Northumberland. Community members and local organizations took the lead in providing ESL classes, volunteer drivers, and information sharing. It was noted by participants that prior to the influx of Syrian newcomers, there was not much local infrastructure in place. Community members had to take the initiative by tapping into their own networks and abilities to support newcomers.

Newcomers mentioned that although the community had extensive supports for newcomers, they were not necessarily well-advertised, and many did not know about these available supports in their first months of living in the community. Established newcomers and community members were the main providers of referrals and information sharing. Those who did not have access to these contacts were likely to be unaware of available supports.

Newcomers reported that they were generally happy. They found Northumberland to be a welcoming community and felt well-supported by the municipal government as well as by existing members of the community. In particular, newcomers appreciated the helpful disposition of their neighbours who looked after them by offering advice and information. Newcomers acknowledged that they were aware it would take time to adapt to a rural culture and infrastructure, and had anticipated that they would experience difficulties when they moved to a new community. The particular barrier faced by all newcomers was finding employment opportunities that matched their skills and experience. Although an expected difficulty, further supports implemented could help ease the employment challenges faced by newcomers when moving into a new community.



NEWCOMER EXPERIENCES IN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

Having discussed the supports and social capital available to newcomers in Northumberland County, we sought to understand its impacts on the experiences of newcomers in Northumberland 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 Northumberland County. The following section outlines the responses given by each stakeholder group.

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“The services and the availability of resources was a bit chaotic. It’s hard to know where to get information.”

- Community member

The lack of transportation was consistently brought up as an issue for newcomers connecting to services and participating in social activities. This was a primary concern for immigrant and out-of-province newcomers who were less likely to have access to private transportation upon first arrival. Transportation was particularly difficult for bigger families who often required two vehicles. This need was most easily met for Syrian newcomers connected through sponsorship groups who had concerted efforts to assist with the settlement of Syrian families including volunteer drivers.

“Very limited supports and resources in Port Hope itself. Most resources are in Cobourg (population 18, 000) but there is no public transit between the two communities, therefore there is a need for a pool of many volunteer drivers. The high school has a bus to pick up the children, but the parents need drivers to get to and from their ESL classes (a roster of between 12 and 15 volunteers who do this).”

- Community member

Leadership

County leaders mentioned that for the most part, newcomers were somewhat connected. This is largely due to community members intentionally moving to the region, either to retire or through a personal connection. County leadership highlighted service clubs, churches, and the art community as promoters of social inclusion. In their opinion, the existence of such groups created a welcoming environment and a vibrant community for newcomers to settle in and eventually establish roots. However, county leadership also acknowledged there were opportunities for improvement, including more local involvement in engaging newcomers and more accessible websites to distribute relevant information.

Newcomers

Overall, newcomers reported that they were happy in Northumberland and that the community was warm and friendly. They acknowledged the efforts of county leadership, as well as of community members, in helping them access the supports they needed in the community. However, newcomers emphasized that certain challenges remain, such as finding suitable employment to match their skills and acquiring reliable methods of transportation.

Most newcomers had no previous connections prior to moving to Northumberland. When moving for employment reasons, newcomers stated that the only connection they had was their employer, co-workers, or consultants. Employees from the Economic Development Office were highlighted as especially helpful. In other cases, a few newcomers were particularly grateful towards their real estate agents for introducing them to the community and even helping them tap into specific networks of interest.

“We did networking through real estate guy who sold us a house here. He introduced us to people around – friends of him in the area. He also happened to be part of the LGBT community.”

- Service provider

Newcomers also had the opportunity to participate in township committees where they were able to meet other newcomers. One of the newcomers interviewed was able to actively network and participate in the community by joining the Chamber of Commerce as a member of its Board of Directors. This newcomer was particularly enthusiastic about their ability to share skills and experiences with their new community. A wide range of support was provided by all various stakeholders in the community and community members served as important contacts for building social networks.

Although newcomers discussed having a generally pleasant experience once connected to supports and networks, they stated that the initial search for those resources was particularly difficult. Newcomers had a difficult time finding the right resources and integrating into the community because they had to find information on their own. It was reported that a main problem that newcomers face was figuring out how to become an engaged member of the community upon arrival. One of the main challenges newcomers faced during their first year was finding a rental house and employment. Newcomers suggested that there is a need for non-traditional methods of looking for employment. LinkedIn is a good start but online methods for applying for jobs need to be strengthened. Finding a job is a difficult process for newcomers. Word-of-mouth was helpful in some cases but not so much for newcomers with specialized skills in industries outside of agribusiness, construction and manufacturing.

“It was really hard for me to find work. I have a Master’s degree and lots of experience regardless of whether it is validated by the country. I have the professional ability to do it, so it was difficult to me find work here because of the language, my accent – people did not understand me.”

- Newcomer

Newcomers’ opinions varied on the level of connectedness they experienced in Northumberland. They felt that the support received largely depended on the type of newcomers they were (i.e. retirees, refugees, urban-to-rural, etc.). Highlights included the friendliness of neighbours who made them feel welcomed in the community. The challenge, however, was the lack of knowledge of what supports existed and where to access them.

“Everyone finds it’s a very friendly place. Newcomers feel very welcomed. Many say they love it here!”

- Newcomer

Service Providers

The majority of service providers felt that the average newcomer was somewhat connected. They highlighted municipal efforts and available services that were available for newcomers. In particular, the library was noted to be not only a space for newcomers to access information, but a venue that allowed for interactions with other community members. However, service providers also acknowledged that connections can vary on an individual basis, often dependent on language fluency and personality. Service providers continued to emphasize how the language barrier remains to be an issue for newcomers as it prevents many newcomers from participating in fundamental activities that facilitates the expansion of social networks.



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. Several newcomer contributions highlighted by community members in Northumberland County are discussed below.

Diversity

As the retirement community continues to grow in Northumberland, respondents expressed the sentiment that newcomers can benefit the vitality of the community. Fostering a greater demographic diversity was seen as beneficial to the community. In Dufferin County, newcomers brought new cultures and ideas, which were then translated into different productive activities, such as opening up new restaurants, creating new associations, and hosting different events.

“Diversity, you’ll find new foods, new ways of doing things, new sports...It’s a beautiful concoction of people coming in. If you want to meet a new culture, experience the world, go say hi to a newcomer!”

- Newcomer

“I want to show you that I’m here, I want to show you my culture, my passion, I want to show you who I am.”

- Newcomer

County leadership emphasized the contribution of newcomers to the liveliness and diversity of the community. Newcomers created cultural organizations that highlighted the demographic diversity of the county. Similarly, these groups ran concerts and activities that benefited the engagement of all individuals in the community. Newcomers also offered their knowledge and experience to community projects and organizations. In particular, retirees offered their skills to churches and service clubs that supported their events and initiatives.

“I’ve been able to learn a lot about those cultures and appreciate the differences and similarities that we have. Being out together as part of the community and celebrating our differences together. The diversity and what that does for the community is essentially [what] makes it a happier place, everybody just feels welcomed here. ”

- Community member, Northumberland Multicultural Radio

Engagement and Effective Participation

While some community members mentioned that there was no immediate benefit of newcomers moving into the area, the majority of participants highlighted community involvement, cultural exchange, diversity, and the positive economic impact of newcomers. Newcomers became primarily involved in the community through volunteering, as well as through their participation in local activities and events. This was particularly beneficial because they brought with them new skills that could benefit the respective organization or initiative. Newcomers indicated their willingness to support the community by contributing their time, skills and experience toward local initiatives. They also volunteered through official municipal channels, such as the Mayor's Task Force or through associations such as the Chamber of Commerce.

Service providers particularly highlighted the benefit that newcomers bring in filling gaps in the community through volunteering. For example, many volunteers became involved in associations or councils in fields where they possessed specific expertise.

"Everyone wins if the newcomer gets involved socially and actively."

- Community member

Newcomers felt that they contributed by offering a fresh perspective to existing problems. While participants acknowledged the different experiences of newcomers, they were optimistic about newcomers' ability to contribute both socially and economically to the county.

"I think we're all very driven to support the communities we're moving into."

- Newcomer

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. Although not all county leaders were aware of measurement tools for community engagement, some mentioned that this is a work in progress. One of the participants mentioned having been recently approved for a project to make use of software technologies to allow for cross-sector coordination between various service agencies and track individual usage. For the most part, county leaders alluded to being informally aware of levels and opportunities for engagement through their own active participation and conversations in the community.

Only half of the service providers interviewed reported that they do some form of tracking for community engagement levels and opportunities albeit not explicitly. The main methods were through individual reports, attendance to programs, tracking of partnership organizations, tracking sponsors, number of service users, satisfaction surveys and informally through conversation.

Economic

Economic Growth

Newcomers were discussed as an economic asset to the community. Newcomers brought with them 'new money' to stimulate the demand for businesses currently in Northumberland. They also opened up their own businesses, encouraged job creation, and created demand that supports the growth of existing businesses. County leadership also highlighted the growth in residential construction as a result of incoming newcomers.

Skills

Service providers and county leaders also discussed that newcomers bring professional skills, education, and work experience that are helpful to smaller towns. County leaders praised the new skills and experience that benefit smaller economies where specialized skills are scarce. Newcomers are seen as a source of wealth and knowledge that benefit the economy. Some participants discussed that newcomers in Northumberland tend to be highly-qualified professionals with a strong desire to contribute in their community.

"The expertise and professional backgrounds of the people that are new to the area, I think that they add tremendous value to the communities they are involved in!"

- Newcomer

Entrepreneurship

In particular, newcomers involved in the **Fast Forward** program have considerable skills and capabilities that support entrepreneurial needs in the community. Newcomers involved in business development employed people, stimulating the local economy. Newcomers were also innovative through their creation of new products or ideas. These businesses contributed to the community through participation and direct involvement in community activities such as festivals.



RECOMMENDATIONS & BEST PRACTICES

Community

Best Practices

- Provided internet radio and streaming services that brought newcomers together
- Networks developed within faith communities were highly praised by newcomers since it allowed them to increase interactions with community members
- Referrals made by community members to newcomers helped them navigate the different types of services that were available to them in the area
- Social groups, such as **Cobourg Friends**, were one of the best ways to meet new people from the community. By joining these groups, newcomers learned about the services offered in the community, including transportation assistance, mental health clinics, and other forms of personal assistance
- Community members were very welcoming and enthusiastic about the amount of diversity and new skills that newcomers brought to the community

Recommendations

- Make more intentional offers of support to promote relationship building. Do not limit engagement with newcomers as just friendly gestures, but expand to nurture relationships over time
- Promote mentorship initiatives to pair newcomers with others who have lived in the county for a long time
- Form a sponsorship group network to increase coordination of support among sponsors
- Centralized community information about social activities and events will help increase newcomer participation in the community
- Promote cultural awareness on the part of employers, since it is important for an understanding of differences in cultures when interviewing and working together
- Implement an official welcoming program, such as Welcome Wagon, where newcomers can be introduced to the community and sign up for groups
- Support organizations that facilitate volunteer activities by providing services for transportation, tutoring, and translation services
- Increase availability of sports facilities and recreational leagues for all ages. This is particularly helpful for the young adult population, who expressed a lack of social opportunities for their age group

Leaders

Best Practices

- Community organizations, such as employment services, received much support from Council and Senior Management, allowing projects to acquire the support they needed to be successful
- Intentional leadership and support for newcomers
- Prioritized strategic plans, budget, and county leadership actions
- Presence at community events brought a sense of inclusiveness to newcomers
- Support of multicultural groups and events promoted diversity
- Allocated funding, staff, and resources to help groups supporting newcomers such as Northumberland Multicultural Radio, Northumberland Newcomers Network (initiated by Mayor with ongoing county staff support)
- A significant contribution was the provision of English language classes which the county provided in order to support refugee integration.
- Online tools, such as the Newcomer Portal, played a significant role in supporting newcomers prior to their arrival.

Recommendations

- Improve communication and promotion of places where newcomers can find information and learn how to gain access to community groups
- Maintain an online system that is user friendly. Promote inclusiveness by involving the public and highlighting newcomer contributions
- Take initiatives to attract younger people to participate in the community
- Open more bike lanes to partially address transportation barriers

“Opening up more bike lanes ... As a newcomer and immigrant you don’t arrive here with a car and moving here is difficult on foot. Having a bike lane would help us get around. In general, more transportation options. It takes a while when you’re a newcomer to buy a car, get a license, register it, etc.”

- Newcomer

- Increase communication and public outreach to ease the search for information
- Develop health, transportation, and other infrastructural resources to enhance social support for newcomers
- Increase funds and support for settlement services that assist newcomers with transitions
- Increase supports for sponsorship groups
- County leadership can lead by example by continuing their efforts to enhance newcomer supports
- Increase local involvement by implementing more accessible websites to access information

Newcomers

Best practices

- Northumberland Newcomers Network – supported by established ‘newcomers’ in the community wishing to support those who have recently arrived, providing opportunities to make business and social connections necessary to help newcomers succeed
- Strong community presence through volunteering created networks and increased newcomer involvement in community activities
- Openness to share one’s own culture created a robust multicultural community. Community members engaged in cultural exchanges with immigrant newcomers, travelled to visit places they learned about, enjoyed new foods and dances, etc.
- Newcomers came together to participate in social activities, allowing them to more comfortably engage in the community

Recommendations

- Develop more personal connections with community members. Take the initiative to join groups and meet new people
- Networking is essential to getting involved in the community and obtaining information
- Visit local charities, churches, community centres, and community groups to get involved

“I guess the best advice would be just to get involved in any capacity that suits you. Our community is starving for volunteers. Visit local charities, churches to see where your expertise could best be utilized.”

- Newcomer

- Promote newcomer events through social media

Service Providers

Best Practices

- Immigration portal provided specific outlets for people to get direction and support
- Highlighted agricultural sector opportunities for newcomer employment, since the agricultural sector is significant in Northumberland
- Referrals made by service providers significantly helped newcomers find more services that were suitable for their needs
- The YMCA and the New Canadians Centre provided referral services, employment support, and children's programs
- The New Canadians Centre provided English language classes which were viewed as fundamental for immigrant newcomer integration
- Creative integration of English language classes and skills training through the Around the World through Cuisine and Food program at the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre. This was a particularly innovative method of addressing two main immigrant newcomer needs: language and employment training

Recommendations

- Offer more intentional newcomer supports to strengthen programming structure and effectiveness
- Give newcomers opportunities to provide feedback on their needs and wants. This will be an effective way for service providers to improve their services
- Embrace new ideas and perspectives that newcomers offer to the community
- Improve the doctor referral system, since newcomers have a difficult time with long wait times
- Increase promotion of the services offered in the community
- Offer one-on-one services to newcomers. Service providers can get a full scope of their specific needs as well as the distinct barriers they face

I FINAL THOUGHTS

The aim of this project was to investigate the existing social capital that were available in rural communities, as well as the strategies that have been used to encourage newcomer engagement. Findings revealed important insights regarding the various processes by which newcomers were able to leverage and expand their social networks to access supports in Northumberland County.

Access to networks that facilitate newcomer engagement were important to create positive experiences for newcomers in Northumberland County. Discussions with various stakeholders in the community revealed that the intentional leadership of county leaders played a fundamental role in helping newcomers become socially connected to the communities in which they lived. The online tools developed for newcomers helped them easily navigate services and programs that helped further build and expand their social networks. The creation of associations, networks, and task forces spurred civic engagement, providing another avenue by which newcomers were able to increase their engagement and build their social networks. Furthermore, the warmth and openness exhibited by existing members of the community eased newcomers' transition of settling into a new community and promoted their integration by helping cultivate a sense of belonging.

Despite the active efforts being made to support newcomers in Northumberland County, some challenges remain. Although many useful supports exist in the community, newcomers find that the information regarding what is available is not well advertised upon arrival. This lack of advertisement contributed to the difficulties that newcomers faced when trying to find and access services or programs in a new environment. For skilled newcomers, the limited employment opportunities in the area posed some challenges for further connectivity and engagement. Employment is a crucial way by which newcomers increase their engagement in the community and further consideration about possible initiatives to address this issue is needed. Additionally, transportation was difficult for newcomers in Northumberland County and the limited infrastructure weakened opportunities for newcomers to access supports that could further expand social developments. Further reflections on how to best address the specific needs of newcomers are needed in order to further expand opportunities that strengthen newcomer engagement in the community.

Newcomers contribute greatly to the growth and success of rural communities. As has been evidenced by this study, dedicated efforts need to be taken to help all newcomers find more avenues to develop social connections to the community. Providing newcomers with greater opportunities to build social networks will allow them to leverage their own resources for their own benefit, as well as for the benefit of the communities in which they reside. As Northumberland County expects to receive more newcomers in the coming years, targeting key areas for improvement is needed in order to provide newcomers with strong networks that will help them fully engage and realize their full potential in their communities.



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APPENDIX I – METHODOLOGY

| METHODOLOGY | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|---|------------------------|
| Focus Groups | 25 |
| Interviews conducted in-person in the community or by telephone | 41 |
| Online survey available upon request | 0 |
| TOTAL: | 66 |

| STAKEHOLDER GROUP | METHODOLOGY | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Newcomers | Focus Group | 0 |
| | Interviews (phone & in-person) | 13 |
| | Online Surveys | 0 |
| | TOTAL: | 13 |
| Community Members | Focus Group | 0 |
| | Interviews (phone & in-person) | 12 |
| | Online Surveys | 0 |
| | TOTAL: | 12 |
| County Leadership | Focus Group | 25 |
| | Interviews (phone & in-person) | 14 |
| | Online Surveys | 0 |
| | TOTAL: | 39 |
| Service Providers | Focus Group | 0 |
| | Interviews (phone & in-person) | 2 |
| | Online Surveys | 0 |
| | TOTAL: | 2 |

APPENDIX II – NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY: ADDITIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL RESOURCES

This section details the operational processes evident in Dufferin 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?

- Churches
- Community organizations (often in collaboration with Service Providers)
- Cultural organizations
- Committees

What Are They Doing?

- **Large focus on refugee newcomers**
 - o Collaboration of community groups formed in response to arrival of refugees
 - Churches formed **Better Together Refugee Sponsorship Group**
 - Community agencies and government formed **Resource Committee on Refugee Sponsorships and Resettlement**
 - o Settlement as main priority
 - Housing, education/training, language
- **Provide programming as well**
 - o Spanish Conversation Circle (Northumberland Hispanic Cultural Club in partnership with Broca's Place of Language and Learning, New Canadians Centre, and Northumberland County)

How Are They Doing It?

- **Collaboration in refugee-related initiatives**
 - o Diversity in collaboration in response to refugee newcomers
 - Resource Committee on Refugee Sponsorships and Resettlement
 - Government representative, service providers
 - o But also work with groups in same realm
 - Better Together Refugee Sponsorship group (composed of 8 churches)
 - Churches work with other churches
- **Often acts as support for services/programs**
 - o Church offers location for ESL classes
 - o Northumberland Multicultural Centre hosts events/activities
- **Few newcomer-targeted activities**
 - o Aside from refugee-related initiatives, overall population of newcomers not particularly addressed in initiatives
 - Focus is on cultural activities or refugee groups

Impacts on Social Capital

- Focuses on well-being and social support aspect of social capital
- Social capital is much more readily provided, and easily accessed, for refugees, rather than for all newcomers

Leadership

Who?

- Economic Development & Tourism
- MPs and government agencies provide support

What Are They Doing?

- **Creating tools for navigation and linkages across agencies**
 - o Immigration Portal
 - Comprehensive website for newcomers regarding what to expect, available services, etc.
 - Links to various community organizations, services, resources
 - o Business Immigration Ontario Portal
 - Tool to integrate business support services
 - To attract business investments – business immigration critical for economic development
- **Securing funding to support projects**
 - o Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC)
 - Around the World through Cuisine and Food program
 - Agri-Food Innovative Immigration Coordinator position
 - o Prosperity for Immigrant Women
 - o Immigration Portal
 - o Business Immigration Ontario Portal
- **Creating platforms for discussions, assessment, and recognition**
 - o Immigration Forum
 - Agencies, organizations, community groups, government reps, township leaders
 - o Funded projects include objectives to create plans and write reports
 - Prosperity for Immigrant Women
 - Community Action Plan to be developed to address challenges hindering immigrant women's economic prosperity
 - Needs-Assessment Report includes recommendations and key findings
 - Agri-food program (Around the World through Cuisine and Food)
 - o Outcomes include development of processes and plan to engage target regions
- **Act as support in collaboration with other programs/initiatives**
 - o Resource Committee on Refugee Sponsorships and Resettlement in Northumberland County
 - o Northumberland Newcomer Radio
 - o NCC projects

How Are They Doing It?

- **Collaboration across wide range of groups in the community**
 - o Spans across two-thirds of our identified stakeholder groups (Community and Services)
 - Immigration Portal
 - Service providers (business/employment/training/library)
 - Community groups (churches, community organizations)
 - Immigration Forum
 - o Community groups (churches, community organizations)
 - o Government officials
 - Agri-food program (Around the World Food and Cuisine)
 - o Service providers (business/employment/training + New Canadians Centre Cobourg)
 - Prosperity for Immigrant Women
 - o Service providers (business/economic/training services, social services)
 - However, no specific targeted collaboration with newcomer-created/based groups. Furthermore, no projects regarding newcomer social engagement/services are undertaken on their own – always in collaboration with, and with support of, other groups.
- **Initiated programs/projects are often funded**
 - o Immigration Portal funded by Municipal Immigration Information Online (MIIO) and program of the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade,
 - o Prosperity for Women project funded by Status of Women Canada
 - o Agri-food program (Around the World Food and Cuisine program) through OAFVC
 - o Business Immigration Ontario Portal funded through investment of provincial and federal funding

Impacts on Social Capital

- Projects developed (Portals) are the first point-of-entry for newcomers in acquiring information and finding programs/resources that facilitate the building of social capital
- Often produce quantifiable and tangible reports/assessment regarding impacts and outcomes of initiatives – can analyze social-capital-related impacts
- Act as support for other social-capital-building initiatives in the county

Newcomer

Who?

- Newcomers
- In collaboration with **employment/business service groups** mainly
 - o Northumberland Newcomers network
 - Supports immigrant entrepreneurs

What Are They Doing?

- **Sharing experiences and stories**
 - o Newcomer Bulletin magazine
 - Featuring successful, longer-term immigrants and uses their stories to inspire newcomers
 - o Newcomer Radio
 - Interviews with local community members, entrepreneurs and leaders
 - o However, primarily one-sided interactions
 - Very few opportunities for engagement and newcomers to interact together

- **Creating forum and opportunities for embracing cultures and diversity**
 - Local cultures, native languages are welcomed
- **Creating opportunities for business immigrant entrepreneurs**
 - Offering opportunities for business mentorship and social networking

How Are They Doing It?

- **Media**
 - Sharing experiences and stories of immigrant and newcomers through media platforms (radio, magazine)
 - Northumberland Newcomer Radio
 - Newcomer Bulletin Magazine
- **Networking/mentorship opportunities**
 - For immigrant entrepreneurs

Impacts on Social Capital

- Large focus on immigrant entrepreneurs and newcomers engaging in business-related activities
 - Social capital opportunities may not be as extensive for other types of newcomers who do not engage in these activities
- Perhaps not many opportunities for direct access to acquire social capital (resources acquired through building of social networks and relationships), but creating and promoting an awareness of belonging and recognition of others in similar situations
- Fostering community belonging and identity

Services

Overall Types of Services

- Agriculture/Farm
- Business
- Social Support
- Employment/skills

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Who?

- **Business-related services**
 - Business Immigration Ontario Portal
 - Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce
 - Business Advisory Centre Northumberland
 - Northumberland Business Development Assistance Corporation (NBDA Corp)
 - Newcomer Loan program
- **Employment/Skills-related Services**
 - Community Employment Resource Partnership (CERP)
 - Watton Employment Services Inc.
 - The Community Training and Development Centre
- **Agriculture**
 - Farm in Northumberland

What Are They Doing?

- **Services targeted to assist entrepreneurs and local businesses**
 - o **HOWEVER** – majority of services not targeted specifically at newcomers – newcomers just fall under mandate of services
 - Northumberland Business Development Assistance Corporation (NBDA Corp)
 - Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce
 - Business Advisory Centre Northumberland
- **Services targeted to improve skills/training**
 - o However, majority of services not targeted specifically at newcomers – newcomers just fall under mandate of services
 - The Community Training and Development Centre
 - Watton Employment Services Inc.
 - Community Employment Resource Partnership (CERP)
- **Services to help acquire loans for businesses**
 - o Northumberland Business Development Assistance Corporation (NBDA Corp)
 - o Newcomer Loan program

How Are They Doing It?

- No collaboration across identified groups
 - o Business service providers working by themselves to provide services
 - o Employment services working with businesses/employers for hiring purposes
- Few services actually target newcomers as objective
 - o Most, if not all, are general services offered to and accessed by the general population
 - o Exception of certain loan programs that require newcomer status as requirement for eligibility

Impacts on Social Capital

- Not directly targeted at fostering social capital for newcomers
 - o Perhaps more of a result that social capital is gained, rather than an explicit fostering of it
 - o Services more oriented towards helping achieve business/entrepreneurial objectives
- Social capital relevant to the professional sphere gained through accessing services, but unsure of the extent that it is useful and relevant to **newcomer** entrepreneurs, rather than existing entrepreneurs in the community

SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Who?

- **New Canadians Centre (NCC)**
 - o Often supported by other community groups who offer space/resources (YMCA, Churches)
- **School Boards**
 - o Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
 - o Peterborough, Victoria Northumberland, and Clarington Catholic District School Board
- **International Organizations**
 - o Horizons of Friendship

What Are They Doing?

- **Support for farm workers**
 - Horizons of Friendship
 - Migrant Farm Workers Project (NCC)
 - Increasing visibility and awareness
 - Addressing barriers that exist due to nature of agricultural work
 - Issues of isolation, transportation, language, accessing community resources
 - Increasing access to social support services
- **Community services and programs**
 - NCC as main provider
 - Offering wide range of services and programs
 - Language services
 - Social events
 - Support groups
 - Newcomer resources
- **School Board services**
 - English Language Learners Support Team
 - Language Line Telephone Translation Service
 - Multi-disciplinary Welcoming Newcomers Task Force
 - Settlement Workers in Schools Program (SWIS)
- **Language**
 - Northumberland Language Mentoring Through Skype
 - English Conversation Circle (at YMCA Cobourg)
 - English classes at NCC
 - Northumberland's English as a Second Language ESL Program
 - Free English Classes – Fleming College (Cobourg Campus)
- **Social support**
 - Community Connections Program (NCC)
 - Women's Group (NCC)
 - Meeting new people, getting to know community, finding social support

How Are They Doing It?

- **NCC main frontrunner for providing services and programs for newcomers**
 - **Collaborating heavily with other community groups**
 - Provides services in all domains (Schools - SWIS, Language - ESL, Social – Women's group)
 - Although other community/service groups do not create/offer programs, they often participate and offer support/resources to NCC
 - Churches, YMCA
- **Heavy support for language services/programs**
 - School Board, YMCA, NCC all offer some type of language program
 - All services offered by School Board are language-based

Impacts on Social Capital

- Explicitly fostering opportunities for newcomers to expand social networks and relationships.



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