

286. Settling, working and belonging: an innovative and collaborative approach to integrating newcomers

Waterloo Region is a community that has always welcomed and benefited from immigration. Presently, 22.3% of Waterloo Region residents are immigrants or refugees from diverse regions of the world, with expected growth to 30% by 2031. Waterloo Region is one of the top seven communities in Canada for receiving immigrants/refugees on a per capita basis (2006 Census). This presentation features participatory community engagement and community collaboration processes seeking to strengthen capacity of government, institutional and not-for-profit sectors to meet the settlement and integration needs of immigrants and refugees in Waterloo Region. The challenges and barriers faced by our newest citizens are varied and complex including: understanding the Canadian health system and accessing needed services, finding employment in their field and getting their foreign credentials recognized, learning a new language, learning how to integrate with local cultures and how to adapt family or personal ways with a new environment, or facing discrimination. Waterloo Region's Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC) and local university representatives from a province wide CURA project - Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) - worked together to develop a comprehensive collaborative settlement and integration strategy. This involved mobilizing and engaging diverse community stakeholders, including settlement agencies, local governments and institutions, community based organizations, recent immigrants and refugees. The joint presentation by community and academic partners will highlight the process and mechanisms for participatory community engagement. The presentation will also include main project findings, including the proposed strategy, structure of the LIPC, and service inventory prepared by WCI.