SUPPORTING NEWCOMER PATHWAYS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

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Canada's immigration system places an emphasis on education and professional experience. However, many highly skilled newcomers to Canada often end up working in precarious, low-skilled jobs and have difficulties accessing job opportunities aligned with their competencies (Lauer et al., 2013). Education and training can provide a bridge to commensurate employment, provided that supports are present to help newcomers access, succeed in and exploit the learnings from these programs. ESDC defines wraparound support as "A set of supports or services provided to an individual, particularly, though not exclusively, from an Indigenous and/or equity-deserving group, that are necessary to mitigate barriers to their participation in the project."[1] Wraparound supports may also be viewed more broadly and in relation to the participant's experience throughout the program access, program completion and employment outcomes phases of skills development interventions.[2] There is a pressing need to learn more about what wraparound supports are, why they

1 Government of Canada. (2022). *Apply for funding to support workers and employers towards economic recovery - Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program – Closed*. Employment and Social Development Canada. www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/sectoral-workforce-solutions-economic-recovery.html

2 Wendy Cukier et al., *Wraparound Supports for Skills Development: Designing and Implementing Programs for Indigenous Peoples and Equity-Deserving Groups* (Toronto: Diversity Institute, 2022).

are important and how wraparound supports can be incorporated to help service providers and government agencies advance meaningful and effective programs tailored to the needs of newcomers. In this article, we identify a set of examples according to factors, such as place of service, type of service provider and immigration status of its users, in order to review a cross-section of existing wraparound supports. In doing so, we aim to make recommendations for a more coordinated system level approach.

There are complex reasons why newcomers are not able to access jobs compatible with their education or experience. Some of these reasons relate to the skills, knowledge and social capital newcomers possess, and some relate to systemic barriers and discrimination, including the lack of recognition of credentials, bias in the hiring processes, and challenges with the design and implementation of programs.[3] Canada invests heavily in training to support newcomers, ranging from language training to bridging programs through a variety of mechanisms at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. Additionally, postsecondary institutions, private colleges, and training organizations purport to provide pathways to employment. While education and training are the backbone of social mobility in Canada, the results are uneven. Many newcomers face barriers to accessing and succeeding in training programs, and recent research suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the career pathing journey for newcomers and inclusive wraparound supports are key to improving outcomes. Figure 1, below, outlines each stage of the career-pathing journey. This framework can be used to assess support requirements throughout the journey, with a direct link to career outcomes.

At each stage of the career pathing journey, some newcomers face challenges. Deciding to pursue training is a daunting proposition in light of many competing priorities.[4] Building self-efficacy, particularly for those who have experienced trauma or bias in dealing with institutions, may require additional psychological support.[5] Navigating systems, supports, unfamiliar job applications and interview processes, and building social capital can overwhelm even experienced and well-resourced professionals.[6] Newcomers may require targeted training and coaching as well as sponsorship and mentoring. Coping with socio-economic barriers including

FIGURE 1. CAREER-PATHING MODEL.



Source: Escobari, M., Seyal, I., & Meaney, M. (2019). *Realism about reskilling: Upgrading the career prospects of America's low-wage workers*. Brookings. www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Realism-about-Reskilling_Brookings_Overview-FOR-WEB.pdf

3 Feenan, Katherine & Shamira Madhany. (2021). Skills for the Post-pandemic World: Immigration and the Success of Canada's Post-Pandemic Economy. May 2021. www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/ImmigrationAndCanadasPostpandemicEconomy.pdf

4 Chen, Wen-Hao and Feng Hou. (2019). Intergenerational Education Mobility and Labour Market Outcomes: Variation Among the Second Generation of Immigrants in Canada. Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series. www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019006-eng.htm

5 Kopala, Mary and Merle Keital (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of Counseling Women*. Sage Publications Inc., California USA.

6 Escobari, Marcel, Ian Seyal and Michael Meaney. 2019. "About Reskilling Upgrading the career prospects of America's low-wage workers." Workforce of the Future initiative, Brookings Institute. www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Realism-about-Reskilling_Brookings_Overview-FOR-WEB.pdf

finances, access to housing, transportation (particularly in smaller communities), child care, or even a wardrobe needed for the job may be challenging. There are also intersectional considerations such as the additional burden women may face because of gender role expectations and unpaid work (e.g., child care, elder care, and household tasks).[7] Skills programs must meet participants where they are at while recognizing the unique complexities of their lives. Wraparound supports to address human capital barriers (e.g., tuition reimbursement), for example, may fail in the absence of strategies fulfilling logistical (e.g., childcare), well-being and labour market access needs.

As more and more programs require access to technology, the costs of networks, devices and the skills to use them may be a barrier. For example, neighbourhoods with large racialized and immigrant populations are less likely to have access to high speed internet and to devices such as smartphones and laptops.[8] A recent study by Diversity Institute, Future Skills Centre and the Environics Institute identified that the cost of high-speed internet in Toronto was more likely to be a concern among racialized families.[9] While, increasingly there is evidence to suggest that wraparound supports may be as critical to success as the training itself, research on the topic has been limited.[10] This is partly due to the lack of consensus on the definition of wraparound support and partly due to the dearth of evaluations that isolate its impact. In a review of 175 programs targeting newcomers and other underserved communities, only three percent had available evaluations.[11] This review also found the application of wraparound supports to be uneven across sectors and providers. The non-profit sector was most likely to offer supports (117 of the 175 programs; 67 percent), followed by programs delivered by, or in collaboration with private sector organizations (e.g., supports associated with NPower Canada's Junior IT Analyst Program, delivered in partnership with Google) and less commonly, by government. Few support programs were offered in association with formal educational service providers, such as colleges and universities.

COMMON SERVICE COMBINATIONS

A recent review of wraparound supports for skills training programs showed that while definitions vary and there is considerable fragmentation in services, many organizations have built wraparound supports for newcomers into their programs.[12] A thematic analysis revealed that supports were designed to address three types of newcomer jobseeker needs: 1) human capital needs (e.g., direct financial support for training); 2) logistical needs (e.g., childcare, providing laptops); and, 3) well-being and motivational needs (e.g., counseling and coaching).

Supports to address newcomer jobseekers' human capital needs are common and may include employment placements, subsidies or lump-sum payments at the end of training completion or tuition, textbook and living expense reimbursements. For example, the Government of Quebec's Employment Integration Program for Immigrants and Visible Minorities (PRIIME) provides payments to immigrants in training, job placements and provides other settlement supports. To support newcomers' skill commensurate employment, PRIIME provides a 30-week wage subsidy to employers when newcomers are hired on their own initiative or through the assistance of Services Québec.[13] Manitoba Start's WorkStart work-experience program provides immigrant youth with mentoring support and eight weeks paid work experience in roles aligned with their interests, education and skills.[14] Work integrated learning and mentorship provide two of the most effective ways of improving the labour market outcomes of newcomers. These programs help newcomers acquire work experience within the Canadian context, develop their networks and build their social capital.[15] Further, work integrated learning allows participants to earn while they learn. Alternative financing options are also available through organizations such as Windmill Microlending, a national not-for-profit that offers low interest loans to skilled immigrants and refugees to pay for the costs of recertifying or getting licensed in Canada. As an organization, it collaborates

7 Coogan, Pauline A., & Professor Charles P. Chen (2007) Career development and counselling for women: Connecting theories to practice, Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 20:2, 191-204, DOI: 10.1080/09515070701391171

8 Andrey, S., Dorkenoo, S., Malli, N., & Masoodi, M. (2021). Mapping Toronto's digital divide. Brookfield Institute. https://brookfieldinstitute.ca/mapping-torontos-digital-divide

9 Wendy Cukier et al., *Wraparound Supports for Skills Development: Designing and Implementing Programs for Indigenous Peoples and Equity-Deserving Groups* (Toronto: Diversity Institute, 2022).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Diversity Institute. (2021). Pathways to Innovation and Inclusion. *Canadian Diversity*, Volume 18, NO. 2, 2021. www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/642_AEC_CanDiv_-vol18no2_EN_V2_LR-2.pdf

13 Government of Quebec. (2023). www.quebec.ca/en/employment/find-job-internship/employment-assistance-programs/immigrants-visible-minorities/employment-integration

14 Manitoba Start. (2022). *WorkStart Work Experience program*. https://manitobastart.com/for-newcomers/work-experience-programs

15 Wendy Cukier et al., *Wraparound Supports for Skills Development: Designing and Implementing Programs for Indigenous Peoples and Equity-Deserving Groups* (Toronto: Diversity Institute, 2022).

with skills trainers to help newcomers access loans to finance their skill development.[16]

Many organizations provide logistical supports, such as childcare, transit or digital devices and internet connectivity, to help newcomers access opportunities. The Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, Times Change Women's Employment Service Inc., and WoodGreen Community Services, all provide laptop loans and internet services to participants who lack suitable access.[17] Unfortunately, technology supports appear to be scarce outside of Toronto. St. Stephen's Community House helps newcomers with free English as a Second Language training and provides childcare and transit subsidies to meet logistical needs and enable participation.[18] The Newcomer Entrepreneurship Hub (NEH), created by the Diversity Institute in partnership with SCCC, delivers professional training to newcomers while enabling their achievement through wraparound supports (e.g., translation and settlement support). To date, 37 businesses have been successfully launched by program graduates and individualized business mentors support their journey.[19]

Often human capital and logistical supports are combined with mentoring, counseling, coaching and psycho-social supports. For example, Scadding Court Community Centre's Newcomer Services Program offers counseling, networking, childcare support and cultural-competency training with assistance navigating the employment and settlement services ecosystem.[20] Some programs have strong connections with employers to provide targeted career support. Since 2004, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council's (TRIEC) Mentorship Partnership program has matched over 22,000 immigrants with established professionals in their field, resulting in improved labour force outcomes.[21] Other organizations in the Immigrant Employer Network, such as the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (IECBC) offer innovative solutions including pre-arrival training.[22] The TRIEC Mentorship partnership resulted in participants being 2.45 times more likely to have quality employment and other employer centered programs such as Diversity Institute's Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) program have demonstrated promising results.[23]

Increasingly there is recognition of the importance of trauma informed approaches. The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), has developed a promising set of guidelines for organizations, however, acute shortages in access to tailored mental health supports remain a challenge.[24] Organizations such as the Ismaili Institutions for Canada have identified this as part of their efforts to resettle refugees as have Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS), particularly in their work with refugees.[25] Organizations such as Green Shield Canada and Inkblot are experimenting with new online culturally appropriate approaches.[26] Community support, networks and social capital are also critical.[27]

The cited examples provide emerging best practices; however, at the system level challenges remain as a result of the fragmentation of training programs and support services in the Canadian ecosystem. This makes it difficult for newcomers

16 Windmill Microlending. (2023). https://windmillmicrolending.org/applicants/eligibility

17 Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre (n.d.). www.riwc.ca; Times Change Women's Employment Centre (n.d.). www.timeschange.org; WoodGreen programs (n.d.). www.woodgreen.org

18 TNG Community Services. (2023). https://tngcommunityto.org

19 Wendy Cukier, Wendy, Guang Ying Mo, Bincy Wilson, Stefan Karajovic and Nicholas Renzetti. (2022). Wraparound Supports for Skills Development: Designing and Implementing Programs for Indigenous Peoples and Equity-Deserving Groups. Diversity Institute, *Forthcoming*.

20 SCCC. (2023). https://scaddingcourt.org

21 TRIEC. (2020). Demand for & Impact of Mentoring Newcomer Professionals: The case of TRIEC Mentoring Partnership - Evaluation Findings. https://triec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Demand-for-Impact-of-Mentoring-Newcomer-Professionals-The-case-of-TRIEC-Mentoring-Partnership.pdf

22 IECBC. (2023). https://iecbc.ca/our-work/programs

23 TRIEC. (2020). Demand for & Impact of Mentoring Newcomer Professionals: The case of TRIEC Mentoring Partnership - Evaluation Findings. https://triec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Demand-for-Impact-of-Mentoring-Newcomer-Professionals-The-case-of-TRIEC-Mentoring-Partnership.pdf, Diversity Institute. (2023). ADaPT (Advanced Digital and Professional Training). www.torontomu.ca/adapt

24 OCASI. (2023). OCASI Guidelines on Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches for Agencies Serving Immigrants and Refugees. https://ocasi.org/sites/default/files/tvia-guide-english-online.pdf

25 Ismaili Institutions for Canada. (2023). https://iicanada.org/health-wellness CCS. 2023. www.cathcrosscultural.org/newcomer-support-services

26 Green Shied Canada. (2021). Better Health for All. 2021 Social Impact Report. https://assets.greenshield.ca/greenshield/2022/blog/pdfs/GSC-2021-Social-Impact-Report-EN-Final-REV-Remediated.pdf

27 Cukier, W. and S. Jackson. (2017). Welcoming Syrian refugees to Canada technology-enabled social innovation. *2017 IEEE Canada International Humanitarian Technology Conference (IHTC)*, Toronto, ON, Canada, 2017, pp. 32-36, doi: 10.1109/IHTC.2017.8058194

to navigate programs, eligibility requirements and applications, especially if they are working in English as a Second Language. Additionally, as there is little system level organization, quality control or support in navigating programs, many newcomers are vulnerable to poorly designed or even predatory programs, which offer training for jobs that never materialize.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD INCLUSIVE WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS

While our understanding of the design and impact of wraparound services is evolving, and more research is needed, there is strong evidence to suggest that a more intentional approach will yield better results. Organizing current supports around the needs of newcomer job seekers as they pertain to their human capital needs, logistical needs, and well-being and motivational needs will help to direct relevant policy and the development of future services, as well as the efforts of government agencies, and other service providers. In doing so, however, we must:

- Ensure consistency in the definition, delivery, and evaluation of wraparound services.
- Provide better access to information about these supports, such as an accessible, centralized database of services.
- Reduce fragmentation, promote cooperation and the sharing of innovative and effective practices, perhaps offering shared services to develop economies of scale.
- Increase employer engagement in the career counseling and wraparound supports.
- Recognize that up front investments (with accountability frameworks) in well designed and effective programs will save money over the longer term and drive economic growth and inclusion not just for newcomers but for the country as a whole.

Ensure all programs have a trauma-informed and intersectional lens applied to them and that trainers and counselors as well as recruiters understand the specific challenges facing newcomers.

Education and training are foundational to social mobility in Canada and wraparound supports can help newcomers access important education and training opportunities. We recommend applying a broad definition of wraparound support that is inclusive of provisions such as childcare, transportation subsidies, food subsidies, technology access, career counseling, mentorship services, networking support, direct financial support, mental health support, and work placement services.[28]

Finally, there is a need for greater coordination between training providers and the community-based organizations and postsecondary institutions providing wraparound. It is also critical that program metrics be identified and operationalized to facilitate robust evaluations, both of employment-training interventions and of the impact of wraparound supports on newcomer success. Finally, a systems approach that prioritizes coordination and alignment between all levels of government, educational institutions, community-based organizations, and employers is requisite. Attention to wraparound supports can facilitate newcomers' participation in employment-training interventions, accelerating the process of social and economic integration and setting the foundation for full and equitable participation.

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