


THE Right *fit*

Attracting and retaining newcomers
in regional towns



A framework for secondary migration based on lessons from around the world

By Talia Stump



“We don’t label people as refugees anymore, because the refugee part is over. That’s in the past and now we need to look into the future. I think that helps them when we think like that, and it helps us. And I think that’s a key for all areas that receive newcomers – to look into the future and look at the skills they bring.”

– Mattias Sjölund, Åre Municipality, Sweden

A newcomer is a...

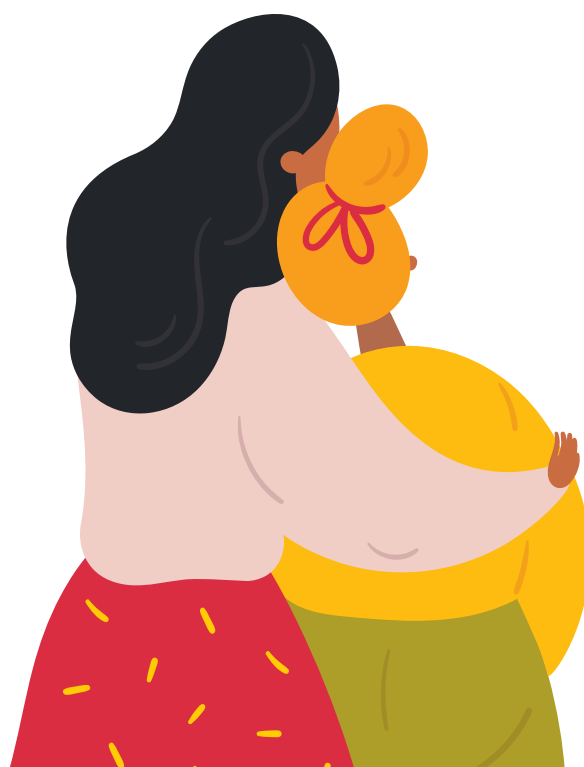
refugee, asylum seeker, foreigner, migrant, new neighbour, new citizen, friend, colleague, employee.

Regional and rural towns around the world face depopulation and decline. Migrants can help reverse this trend, but many towns aren't aware that they don't have to look abroad to find people. There are people from migrant and refugee backgrounds already living in the same country, in larger cities, who might be interested to relocate and who can offer what the town is looking for. Secondary migration is when migrants choose to relocate from their initial destination to a new location. It can create strong futures for regional communities and newcomers, so long as the fit is right.

There are many towns around the world that have managed to stem population decline through newcomer attraction and retention. From March to May 2019, I visited some of these towns in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden to learn what has worked well and what some of their challenges have been. My research was part of a Churchill Fellowship, and builds upon my work in the New South Wales Government supporting refugee settlement in regional areas.

This report introduces a framework, based on the findings, for regional towns looking to attract and retain newcomers. It is intended to help people in regional communities, whether they are community members, elected officials, support organisations or employers, step through each phase of the process from planning an attraction strategy through to growing their community. The framework reflects the lessons learned and offers practical strategies that can be implemented in diverse contexts.

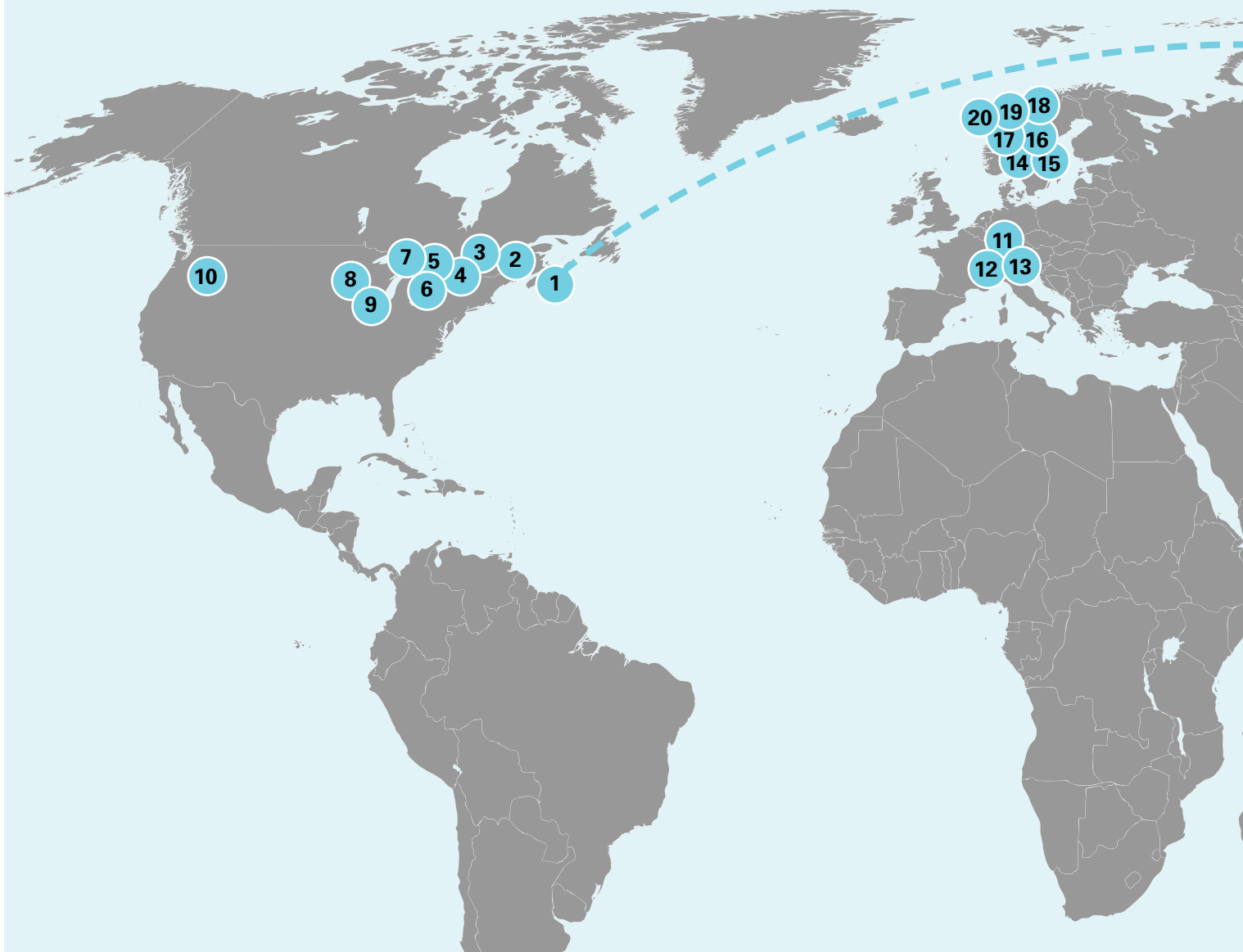
This framework should not be interpreted as an exhaustive list of everything that needs to happen to make secondary migration successful. Nor should it be considered a linear process. Attraction and retention of any newcomers, whether they are refugees, migrants or new-resident citizens, is a complex, iterative and challenging process which requires long-term collective effort. If regional towns can capitalise on the economic and social contributions of newcomers, this pays dividends in so many ways. It can grow businesses, keep schools open, create new sporting teams and transform communities into vibrant and thriving places.



Scope of research

This research sought to identify strategies to support the secondary migration of refugees to regional and rural towns. From March to May 2019, over 60 interviews and meetings were conducted in-person with organisations and stakeholders in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden representing:

A range of towns with experience attracting and retaining newcomers were selected to represent a cross-section of different sizes, demographics, socio-political contexts and approaches.



3 Federal governments

6 Provincial / County level government

8 Local / Municipal level government

7 Volunteer groups

I3 Educational institutions and think-tanks

I2 Business and employment services

I3 Migrant and refugee serving organisations

39 Newcomers



1. Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
2. Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
3. Ottawa, Canada
4. Belleville, Ontario, Canada
5. Guelph, Ontario, Canada
6. Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
7. Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada
8. St Joseph, Minnesota, USA
9. St Cloud, Minnesota, USA
10. Missoula, Montana, USA
11. Kempten, Bavaria, Germany
12. Immenstadt, Bavaria, Germany
13. Sonthofen, Bavaria, Germany
14. Åre, Jämtland County, Sweden
15. Mörsil, Jämtland County, Sweden
16. Järpen, Jämtland County, Sweden
17. Bodø, Nordland County, Norway
18. Svolvær, Nordland County, Norway
19. Leknes, Nordland County, Norway
20. Ramberg, Nordland County, Norway

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The world is increasingly urban, but cities aren't for everyone

Regional and rural communities all around the world face declining populations which threaten their survival. As birth rates fall and young people leave for education and employment opportunities in large cities, many communities struggle to meet local labour needs and maintain economic vitality. Meanwhile around the world cities are expanding and by 2030 urban areas are projected to house 60 percent of the global population¹. Immigration could help reverse this trend but are the right decisions being made to achieve this potential?

Recent policy decisions in Australia and overseas have emphasised visa incentives which force migrants to remain in regional towns for fixed periods of time only to see them move away when the time is up. Regional communities need to focus on how they can make themselves attractive to migrants and refugees so that people come and then choose to stay.

At the same time, the world is experiencing an unprecedented movement of people across borders. The number of people displaced by conflict and war has reached an all-time high of 70 million. A very lucky few find themselves able to resettle in countries where there is a chance to find safety and realise economic opportunities. Some refugees arrive directly

in regional towns but most gravitate toward cities, mirroring the general population. For refugees, larger cities offer connection to family or people from the same cultural group which are an important source of emotional and practical support, especially when they first arrive. There is also ready access to specialised support services to help people meet their initial needs such as health, housing and language development.

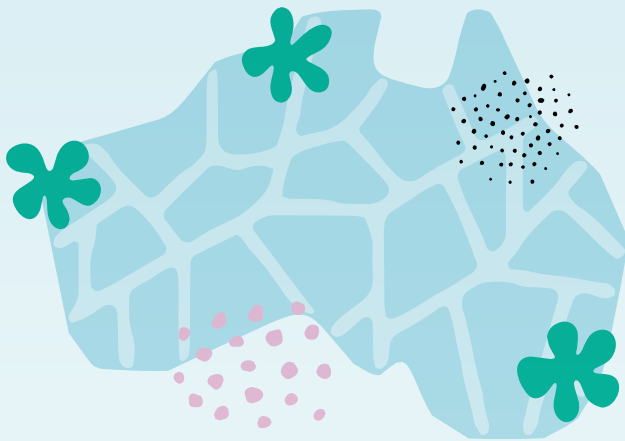
After some time, however, many find that life in a big city is not what they had hoped for. It is difficult to find a job, the cost of housing is expensive and people feel socially disconnected. Regional towns can provide a welcoming new home for refugees by offering attractive employment opportunities and a good quality of life. Many refugees in larger cities, however, aren't aware of what it's like to live in the country and don't know how to connect with the jobs and opportunities on offer.

1. www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/urbanization/the_worlds_cities_in_2016_data_booklet.pdf

The Australian context

Thanks to migration, Australia's population is growing but a disproportionate number of migrants and refugees are settling in capital cities. Regional Australia has critical skills shortages and positions that cannot be filled locally. It needs migrants to build the local workforce, support entrepreneurship and contribute to local communities.





67%
of Australia's
population lives
in capital cities

83%
of overseas
born people live
in capital cities

78,000
refugees arrived
in Australia in
2014-2019

15%
settled in
regional areas

Over the past five years, only 15% of refugees in Australia have settled in regional areas. At the same time, moved by media images of the global humanitarian crisis, more and more Australians in regional areas have put their hand up to bring refugees to their town. There are around 15 regional centres that have been approved by the Australian Government as primary refugee settlement locations. These are predominantly larger communities with a population of over 100,000 people. For smaller towns not on this list, there is great interest in how they can look to secondary migration to bring people in.

Refugees arrive with needed skills and high levels of entrepreneurialism yet many fail to get a foothold in the labour market. Others are compelled to accept positions below their skill level. Competition for jobs in capital cities is an added challenge.

**ESTIMATED
60,000**
job vacancies are available
in regional Australia today²

17%
of refugees are in paid work
after being in Australia for
18 months³

60%
of refugees held high skilled
jobs in their former country
of residence while only
**26% have those jobs
in Australia⁴**

2. www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/RegionalMigration/Media_Releases

3. www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/building-a-new-life-in-australia-bnla-the-longitudinal-study-of-humanitarian-migrants

4. 47 Note: BNLA data based on primary and secondary applicants aged 18-65 where data is available for all variables included in the regression analysis for consistency. Data is unweighted. Source: Building a New Life in Australia, Longitudinal Study of humanitarian migrants, Wave 1 and 2 interviews responses, 2016; Personal Income of Migrants, Australia, 2011-12, ATO Data



Kids for schools
Quality education

Employment
Skilled workers

Community
Vibrancy

Finding the right *fit*

Secondary migration can be win-win for newcomers and regional communities. Success depends on finding the right fit between what the newcomers and regional community are looking for.

Affordable housing
Investment

Growth
Opportunity





How to attract and retain newcomers through secondary migration



What is needed to *attract and retain* newcomers in regional towns



The following framework captures the key lessons learned from international towns that have grown their community through migration. This is what is needed to successfully attract and retain newcomers in regional towns.





Plan

Build community consensus

- Inform and engage the community to build support for newcomer attraction
- Embrace your past by respecting those who have come before

Take stock

- Build collaborative networks to get the whole town involved
- Include newcomers in planning to tap into lived experience
- Take a regional approach to leverage resources and expertise across the region

Connect

Sell your town

- Develop targeted promotional campaigns to highlight your selling points
- Engage the community influencers to reach new audiences

Support individual decision making

- Help people to weigh up their options and what they are looking for
- Conduct exploration visits to towns to see and feel the place
- Use technology to overcome distance and connect newcomers with employers





“For 95% of clients, employment is the number one factor. Second is a peaceful life. A lot of immigrants and refugees come to Toronto from very large cities – they are just overwhelmed and are looking for a change. So if they can get employment in a small community, they will be happy there.”

– Tania Maximenko, Newcomer Centre of Peel, Canada



“What we have decided here is that we see all the newcomers as an asset. We need more people here in this area. The companies need more labour, so this is a good thing for us. This is not a burden, this is a resource.”

– Mattias Sjölund, Åre Municipality, Sweden

Welcome



Welcome

Get to know each other

- Grow the goodwill to include the whole community
- Create meeting spaces where social connections can form
- Harness the power of storytelling to generate support

Focus on jobs and skills

- Engage the employers to recruit and support newcomer employees
- Utilise and value the skills of newcomers into fulfilling employment

Take an inclusion approach

- Build the capacity of services to reduce discrimination and support diversity
- Help newcomers to navigate the system and know where to go for help



Grow

Grow

Help families to put down roots

- Invest in children and young people to anchor families
- Reach out to spouses to boost social and economic participation

Keep an eye on things

- Provide safe spaces to hear concerns and respond sensitively
- Manage community expectations when things don't go as planned

Framework in action: innovative examples and case studies

This section illustrates the framework in further detail supported by innovative examples and case studies to bring the strategies to life. It is intended to spark inspiration and new ideas for regional towns that are at different stages of developing and implementing their own attraction and retention initiatives.



Plan



There is no quick and easy solution for population issues. Any attraction strategy needs to start with recognition and acceptance of the need for change and engage all levels of government, community leaders, business and civil society to make it work.

The community needs to see newcomers as individuals who can contribute the skills, workforce and qualities that are desperately needed to sustain and grow the town. This is particularly true for refugees, who are often viewed through a deficit lens as people in need of help and protection.

Build community consensus

Crisis and urgency can be powerful catalysts for embracing new ideas and innovation. For some towns, the Syrian crisis has brought the topic of newcomer attraction to the fore but in others it has been triggered by critical labour shortages. Regardless of the starting point, towns are most successful in attracting and retaining people when there is strong community consensus of the benefits.

When a community understands the population realities it faces, whether it is declining birthrate, the impact of ageing or workforce shortages or any other challenge, they are able to build the business case for newcomer attraction and retention.



1. Inform and engage the community

Community meetings can be a powerful way to inform and engage community members. While not everyone will agree that their community needs newcomers, community meetings give the opportunity to be part of the process, allowing them the space to ask questions, raise concerns and develop a shared vision to help carry the strategy forward.

Leadership from the business sector

Guelph, Ontario

In Guelph, Ontario, Jim Estill was moved by the headlines emerging from the 2015 Syrian War. CEO of a multimillion-dollar appliance company, he teamed up with local religious and community organisations to hatch an ambitious plan; a refugee resettlement initiative to reignite the town and help refugees. In a community hungry for new talent, with low unemployment and workforce shortages, Estill's message was simple: this is the right thing to do for the refugees and the right thing to do for your business.

The first step in this plan was to hold an open-door series of community meetings, each of which drew over 100 attendees. Estill's standing in the community was critical in getting such a broad cross-section of locals to show up. At community meetings, he played a leading role in answering questions and swaying the naysayers. He used his business contacts to convince other business owners and community leaders to get involved, which further galvanised support throughout the

community. What started as an individual idea became a collective vision shared by the whole town. Four years on, nearly 100 families have arrived with high retention rates, with many in full-time work.

#ImmigrationMatters

#ImmigrationMatters is a Canadian Government campaign aimed at promoting the benefits of immigration to Canadian society. Officials travel coast to coast convening conversations with regional communities about their population needs and the role that immigration has played, or could play, to help their community flourish. Each conversation features a presentation which sheds light on the local demographic reality and the industries experiencing labour shortages.

“People in the community should feel safe with the situation they are already in, so that they won't be afraid of new people coming. This is a key ingredient for a welcoming community.”

– Zdenek Dvorak, Nordland County Government, Norway



TIPS

- Engage the community leaders and 'non-traditional' players in planning and building support.
- Share economic and population data about the town to build recognition of the need for immigration and benefits for everyone.
- Involve First Nations communities and leaders from the very beginning.
- Place the skills and workforce gaps in your region at the centre of your attraction strategy.
- Keep the community informed at every step.

2. Embrace your past

When you walk down a street in a regional town, the odds are that many of the people you pass are descendants of people who, at some point in the distant or near past, have come from abroad in search of a better life. It's easy to lose sight of where we have come from and the contributions made by newcomers that have helped the community get to where it is today. Local identity is also shaped by indigenous populations who should be recognised and included in community planning.

Towns that keep sight of where they have come from and value the contributions of past migrants find it easier to welcome other newcomers.

'Asylum', a familiar concept

Oberallgäu, Germany

When millions of refugees started streaming into Germany in 2015, locals made sense of the sudden change by drawing connections with the mass displacement that occurred during World War 2. After a large number of refugees arrived in Munich, counties across Bavaria were directed by the Government to take a share in order to relieve the pressures. In the quiet, rural region of Oberallgäu, this was initially met with some local resistance. Then something remarkable happened. Volunteers came forward, in their thousands, to support the refugees and make them feel welcome.

"We had this deep connection to the concept of 'asylum'", said Dr Armin Ruf, formerly the Integration Project Manager at local refugee support organisation, Caritas. As part of the 'Meine Gemeinde' (My Community) project, he held community discussions in towns across Oberallgäu to provide information and try to alleviate concerns about the refugees. "Everyone in Germany knows what asylum means. It wasn't so long ago that Germans were fleeing to other countries for help, and now it's just the other way around".

Drawing on the area's own history was instrumental in shifting attitudes and triggering action.

Community leaders help build support

Missoula, USA

In 2016, when the town of Missoula, USA first started thinking about resettling African refugees some locals were apprehensive about how they would fit in. It seemed a radical idea for the town. Located in central Montana, most newcomers in recent years were students from other parts of the USA. There was also some concern within the indigenous community. The region's history of dispossession, dislocation and removal of land from Native American people meant that there was resistance to allowing outsiders into their community. Community leaders were vital in responding to these concerns and appealing to Missoulians' shared identity as a tolerant and unified place.

Some Native American community leaders spoke out vocally in support of bringing the refugees, encouraging others to think about their shared human values. Mayor John Engen took every opportunity to remind locals that it was only 40 years ago that over 350 Hmong refugees were resettled in Missoula from Laos.

"There will come a time when Missoulians won't remember when Congolese tradition wasn't part of the Missoula tradition in the same way today that we really don't remember when Lao tradition wasn't part of who we are. The grandchildren of those refugees are now represented at the Missoula Farmers Markets, where their produce is renowned, and their contribution to the community is widely recognised and celebrated."

– Mayor John Engen



Take stock

Many communities are keen to initiate an attraction strategy but feel constrained by limited resources. Despite this, every community already has some services, resources and assets that can serve as starting points. If a community starts by thinking about what makes them strong, this helps them to build on what is already in place.

1. Build collaborative networks

Thriving regional towns that have succeeded in attracting newcomers have usually done so by engaging the whole community, from ordinary citizens to business leaders, police to health services, schools to indigenous elders. Having a broad cross-section of representatives around the table will help to identify what's working well but also any gaps that need to be addressed.

Newcomer attraction and retention requires concerted action and careful planning involving all community stakeholders.

Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council

Fredericton, Canada

People in Fredericton are acutely aware of the urgency to attract and retain newcomers. They live in New Brunswick, the province with the fastest declining population in Canada. Between 2011 and 2016, the population dropped by 0.5% due to an ageing population (20% over 65 years old), out-migration of youth and a low birth rate. With a critical shortage of skilled and unskilled workers, this is having a significant impact on the local economy and sustainability of the city.

These challenges paved the way for the formation of the Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council (NPC) in 2015. Led by local economic development agency Ignite Fredericton, the NPC is a multi-sectoral committee that aims to improve newcomer settlement, integration and retention through partnerships, collaboration and communication. The committee meets quarterly and is co-chaired by an elected Councillor and staff member from the City of Fredericton. It has 15 members from diverse sectors of the community including school boards, settlement services, police, the chamber of commerce, health, university, vocational training and the provincial government.

Local working committees feed into the NPC to drive forward seven strategic areas:

1. Integration
2. Welcoming and Safe Communities
3. Employment and Training
4. Children and Youth
5. Entrepreneurship
6. International Student Retention
7. Health

The NPC has been the catalyst for creating a culture of collaboration and innovation across community, government and business in Fredericton. It has made newcomer attraction and retention the main topic of discussion within the city and enabled initiatives and services to be streamlined and better coordinated. Measures to build 'a welcoming and supportive city' are now clearly written into the city's 25 year Growth Strategy, a clear statement from the City of Fredericton that a welcoming community is good for economic growth.



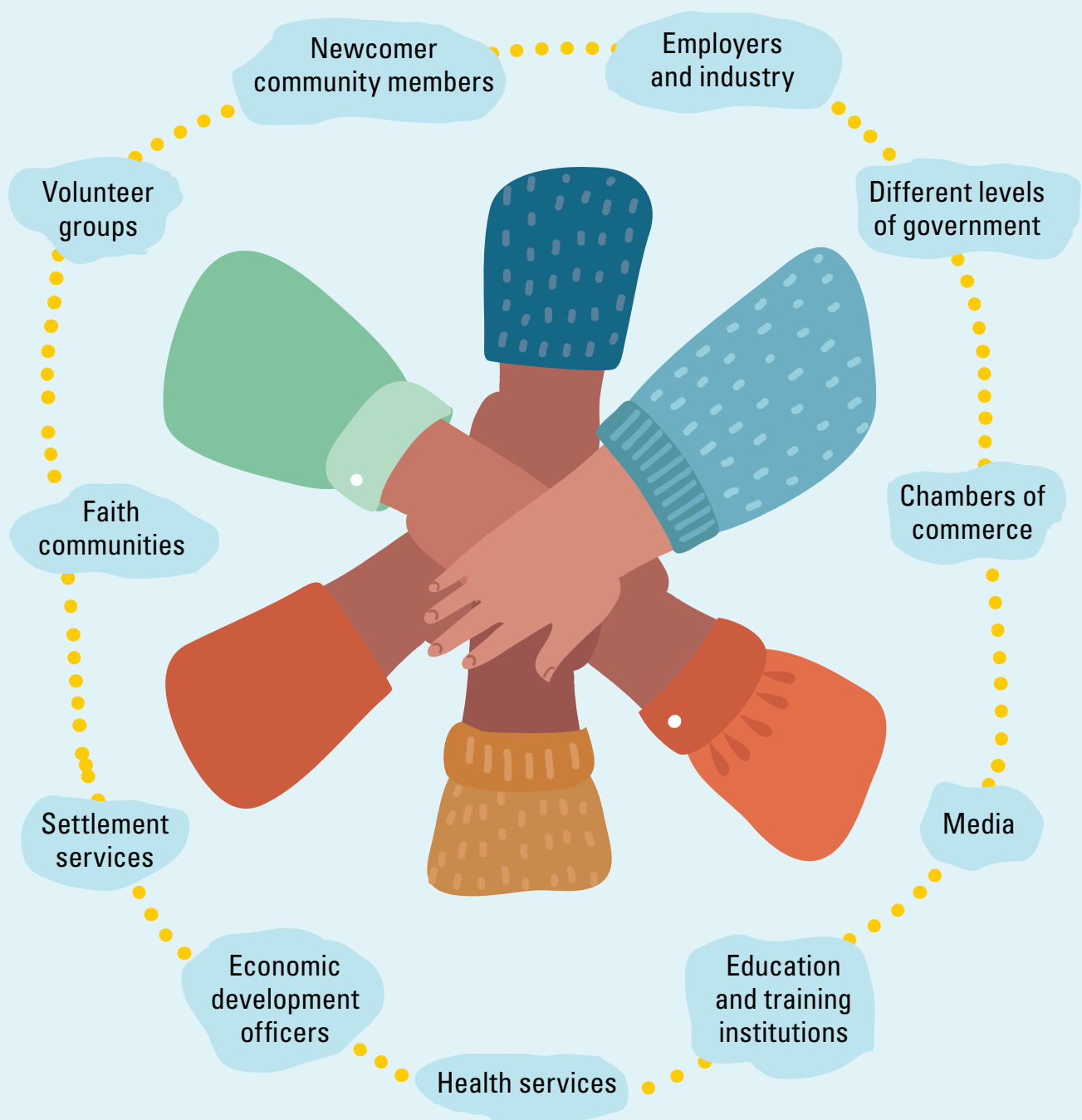
TIPS

- Set a vision for your community and create the mechanisms for all sectors to get involved.
- Uncover and build upon your town's existing assets and resources.
- Involve local government early on.
- Align newcomer attraction and retention efforts with long-term local economic development strategies.

Building partnerships

“In order to help newcomers settle and call this place their home, we have to work across the board in all levels to create a welcoming community. And in all levels they have to work together to break down the barriers.”

– May Ip, United Way of Bruce Grey, Canada



2. Include newcomers in planning

Talking to newcomers can offer rich and unique insights into a community's strengths and weaknesses. The most effective attraction and retention strategies have moved beyond consultation to involving newcomers in planning and decision-making discussions.

Involve existing newcomers in your community to understand, from their perspective, what is working well, and where any gaps in services may be.

Newcomer first impressions survey

Huron County, Canada

When developing their newcomer attraction strategy, Huron County in Ontario, Canada, decided to bring outsiders in to help them articulate what the county had to offer newcomers and identify what could be made better within their community. The County developed the Newcomer First Impressions Community Evaluation survey (NFICE) which invited refugees and immigrants living in the nearby city of Guelph to visit the small town of Exeter. Participants toured the town in pairs and visited local sites ranging from the grocery store to the health clinic. After their visit, they were asked to record their first impressions in a survey and reflect on interactions they had throughout the day.

The insights gained helped Huron County to develop new strategies to ensure that the first impression of a potential newcomer to the community is a positive one. They also revealed what newcomers are looking for when deciding to relocate. Across the board, participants found Exeter to be a welcoming place and this is now celebrated as a cornerstone of what the community has to offer.

Surprisingly, one of the most positive impressions related to the quality of day care, which the community hadn't previously identified as an asset. Thanks to the NFICE, it is now profiled as part of their attraction efforts.

Newcomer advisory committee

St Cloud, USA

The Mayor of St Cloud, Minnesota established an advisory committee of representatives from diverse migrant and refugee communities in St Cloud. *Create CommUNITY* began to address racial and other human rights issues but has grown to become a mechanism focused on systemic change across education, health, housing and community relations in St Cloud. The committee's annual Conversation on Race event, now in its 14th year, has provided a powerful platform to dismantle structural racism in St Cloud by opening up dialogue between newcomers, organisations, business and schools.



3. Take a regional approach

Smaller centres often struggle to access the resources necessary to implement newcomer attraction and settlement initiatives. Coordinating efforts across a region will help local communities to capitalise on existing expertise, resources and opportunities within surrounding towns.

The In-Migration Project – 10,000 inhabitants in 5 years

Nordland County, Norway

In 2013, Nordland County in northern Norway realised they had a big problem on their hands. Nordland encompasses an area of 38,000km² and includes 44 municipalities. The region, famous for its significant mineral resources, fishing and tourism industries, had become overly dependent on short-term foreign labour. Workers, mostly from Eastern Europe, would fly in for several months at a time then return home, taking their pay checks with them. With over 40% of the local workforce projected to reach retirement by 2030, the region was in big economic trouble.

While some municipalities in the region were doing their best to hold onto their young people, their efforts were barely making a dent in the situation. Given the size and remoteness of many of the municipalities, the challenge was too great for most to tackle on their own. Complicating things, the low-skilled, manual nature of most of the jobs on offer meant few educated Norwegians wanted them. The only option left was to find a new labour force.

In 2013 Nordland County therefore launched its *In-Migration Project*, a pilot which sought to attract 10,000 new long-term inhabitants to the region by 2018. The aim of the pilot was

to encourage municipalities to think holistically about regional attractiveness through enhanced cooperation between government, business and civil society organisations. Seven municipalities opted in to the pilot. They were each supported with regional funding to implement their own local projects, ranging from a seasonal worker retention project in Flakstad to a farming initiative for refugees in Nesna.

“In these small municipalities, it’s personal. It’s a small community with 50 to 100 houses. 30 of them are empty and used as holiday houses and the school is gone. It’s difficult for the community to be active. It’s easier for us on the regional level because we can view resources and people across the whole county.”

– Kirsten Springer Hasvoll, former Project Coordinator, Nordland County Government

The success of the program has been its ability to leverage expertise, resources and opportunities across the whole region. Establishing a mentoring network across all the participating municipalities helped towns share what they were learning, improve coordination between towns and showcase the successes. This also led to collaborative solutions to address major barriers, such as housing shortages.

By 2018, the project had successfully attracted 6,300 long-term immigrants to the region in addition to the many more seasonal workers. While not quite reaching its target and the population is still not growing, Nordland has at least managed to stabilise things and stem its rapid decline.

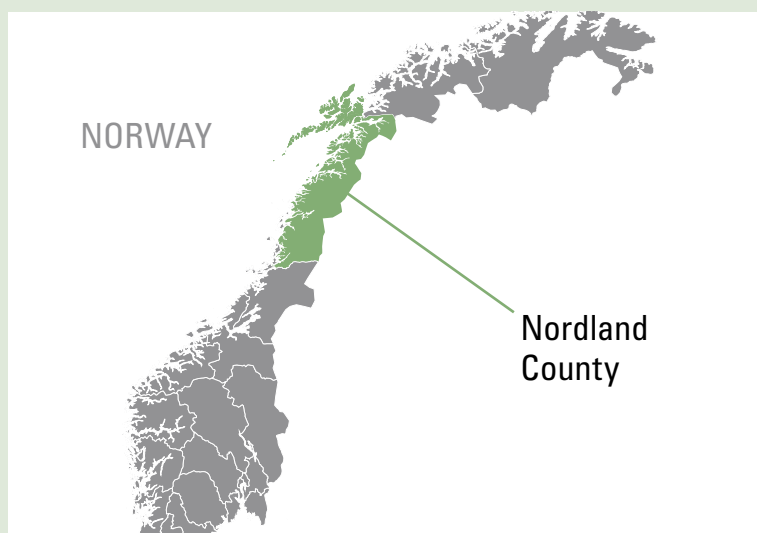


TIPS

- Think regional – join with surrounding towns to capitalise on expertise, capacity and resources across a region.
- Map jobs and find ways to combine different seasonal positions that can be offered to people as year-round employment.
- Identify and leverage the settlement resources available in your region.

In focus:

Nordland County Norway



Includes 44 municipalities
across 38,000km²

Population: 240,000

Major industries: Fishing,
mineral resources and tourism

Farms 11 % of global salmon
consumption

4% projected population growth
by 2040 from net migration

Key learning to offer

When Nordland County consulted with seasonal migrant workers to understand what it would take to get them to settle permanently in the region, they discovered that stable work was only one part of the picture. The In-Migration Project, a migrant attraction initiative which had initially focused on skills development and language training, shifted its emphasis to be on social participation and inclusion for newcomers. It was clear that everything happening outside of work was of high importance for people wanting to reside on a long-term basis. Funding was redirected to support the activities of volunteer groups, community organisations and sports associations.

“The key question here is how to keep people in our community. What we see here in this region, up north in Norway, is that without refugees or immigrants there would be a serious decrease in the population. We would be less and less and it would be harmful for our society. Dangerous for our future.”

– Kristin Blomstrand Koch, Svolvær



Stories from Nordland County on pages 23, 28, 31, 32, 38, 39, 45 and 54

Connect



To successfully connect refugees and migrants in cities with regional towns, it is important to be clear on what each party is looking for. Taking time to understand the skills, characteristics and motivations of newcomers as well as the social and economic objectives of the regional town, helps to make the right match.



Sell your town

“We have got to redefine rural for our clients to really understand what rural is. If you come from a developing country you think rural has no running water, no utilities... so we redefine it as a smaller version of Toronto. It might be a little distance away, but there are opportunities to connect you with your profession before, or a related profession.”

– Oliver Pryce, Newcomer Centre of Peel, Canada

1. Develop targeted promotional campaigns

Immigration promotion resources and campaigns can be an effective way to get the message out about regional towns to a broad audience. While the features and selling points of a town might have broad appeal, the way this information is communicated will need to change depending on the audience and different strategies will be needed for migrants and refugees. The most effective campaigns have been when towns are able to portray a welcoming image that celebrates their multicultural identity.



Immigration Greater Moncton Online Portal

Canada

www.immigrationgreatermoncton.ca



Winning features:

- Videos and stories from newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds in Greater Moncton are the first thing you see when you open the website and are featured on every page.
- Information is presented in a clear and logical way with links to external websites and resources (using plain English).

Welcome to Nordland Flyer

Norway

www.bodo.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/nordland-preview.pdf



Winning features:

- The number of current jobs available and the most sought-after professions are clearly visible (quickly conveys what kind of people the town are looking for).
- Images capture the distinctive outdoor character of the region.

“We no longer think it’s enough to just advertise jobs and hope the people will come. We realise it’s in our best interests to make sure people feel part of the community, but also to target the right people. If you like silence, nature, to get to know people... if you want a good place for your children or you want to travel, then Nordland is good for you. We need to paint the full picture, not just show what’s nice.”

– Kirsten Springer Hasvoll, Nordland County Government, Canada



TIPS

- Ensure that images reflect your town’s multicultural identity.
- Translate information into different languages.
- Make marketing material tangible – specify the jobs that are needed and what it’s like to live in your community.
- Be conscious of ‘rural’ stereotypes and actively seek to dispel these.

2. Engage the community influencers

For newcomers looking for a new home, the strong community networks and kinship groups of refugee and migrant communities already established in major cities can be what draws them there. These groups each have their own established structures and power dynamics which can influence the choices of its members. While this can be helpful, it can also include spreading misinformation about rural towns based on preconceived ideas and experiences from their home country.

Identifying and leveraging the influencers in these established communities can be a powerful way to change the narrative and promote opportunities in smaller towns and encourage relocation.

Who are some of the influencers?

- Community leaders
- Religious leaders
- Settlement and employment services (know their client base and what they are looking for)
- Media (TV, newspaper, social media, community radio)
- Existing newcomers in the destination town



Tapping into social networks

Owen Sound, Canada

For many recently arrived Syrian refugees in Canada, the town of Owen Sound, Ontario, was just an unknown dot on the map. This all changed when word got out via the mobile phone messaging platform, WhatsApp that the river-side town made a great new home with plenty of jobs and a friendly community of 20,000 people. The network of Syrians across Canada is strong and interconnected. It wasn't long before other families started relocating to Owen Sound, having first settled in other parts of the country. They were welcomed by the community with open arms.

Countering the city lure

Leknes, Norway

When a group of Afghan refugees arrived in Oslo after leaving their initial destination of Leknes on the Lofoten Islands, it was not at all what they expected. The fierce competition for work, expensive rent and few supports available suddenly made their life in Leknes seem like a dream. They quickly high tailed it back and spread the word amongst the Afghan community – while it doesn't have the excitement of a big city, Leknes is the place to be if a decent job and comfortable life is what you are after.



Support individual decision making



Refugees and migrants are individuals and families with different life circumstances, experiences, skills and dreams for the future. This diversity needs to be reflected in the range of strategies used by regional towns to connect with people interested in relocation.

The Rural Employment Initiative from the Newcomer Centre of Peel in Canada is an innovative example of how to support individuals to make informed decisions about relocation based on their unique circumstances.

The Rural Employment Initiative

Peel, Canada

More than half of Canada's immigrants and refugees go to MTV (Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver). In the Greater Toronto Area, there is a concentration in the Peel Region, with immigrants accounting for 51.5% of the population. After an initial period of intensive job-seeking, it doesn't take long for many newcomers to realise the serious competition for work.

As the main settlement organisation in Mississauga, a city within Peel, the Newcomer Centre of Peel (NCP) is the first stop for most of the new-arrivals. In 2016, they started the Rural Employment Initiative to offer rural employment as an alternative option for the increasing number of newcomers unable to find work. The program connects jobseekers with employment opportunities in rural areas that are in line with their skills and experience.

NCP staff take care to ensure that jobs are located in businesses and towns where newcomers and their families will be embraced. They have developed partnerships with a range of towns across Ontario where the community has demonstrated they have done the necessary groundwork to be welcoming and inclusive.



"This is a long-term program. We're not about a quick fix. We've had requests from people for 100 employees in manufacturing. That's not going to happen and is not what this is about. You can't move 100 people into a manufacturing plant. They will stay maybe two weeks and then come back to Toronto."

– Tania Maximenko, Project Coordinator, NCP

Lessons from the Rural Employment Initiative:

The goal is to find the right fit for that individual or family, not only with the job, but the rural community itself.



1. Help people to weigh up their options

Helping someone to secure rural employment involves intensive and individualised support. NCP staff guide their clients through the decision-making process, starting with their skills, work experience and career aspirations. The needs and values of each client are also an important part of the equation. The goal is to find the right fit for that individual or family, not only with the job, but the rural community itself. For example, if someone has medical needs, access to a hospital should be prioritised.

Clients are educated on job application techniques, including the importance of showing rural employers their interest in both the business as well as the community as a whole. Openly discussing potential challenges helps clients be as prepared as possible when deciding whether a town is the right one for them. One-on-one conversations are essential to work through any misconceptions and concerns newcomers may have about what it's like to live in a rural Canadian community.

"People come here for a better future for their children so we need to help them understand that in Ontario, good universities are not just in Toronto", Tania Maximenko.

The job match-making process begins with NCP staff promoting candidates widely through their rural networks. Job fairs hosted by NCP have been a great way for jobseekers to connect with employers and sometimes participate in interviews on the spot. When travel is costly, virtual job fairs conducted online offer a convenient and cheap alternative.

2. Conduct exploration visits to towns

Most people won't move to an unfamiliar place without an initial visit. Organising group bus visits to rural towns has been a great way for NCP clients to see and experience a potential new home.

On a bus visit organised by NCP, about thirty newcomer jobseekers toured and met with businesses in Owen Sound, about two hours' drive northwest of Toronto. Many had been in touch with employers before the visit but being there, and speaking to locals in person, gave them a better sense of what it would be like to live and work in the town.



The visit left participants with a strong impression of 'welcome' which started from the moment they arrived and were greeted by the Deputy Mayor, local services and community volunteers. It helped alleviate concerns and determine whether Owen Sound was the right fit for them. For example, the lack of public transport meant that having a car and driver license would be essential. Some participants who had been concerned about a potential lack of amenities were surprised to see the town actually had a Walmart.

3. Use technology to overcome distance

Located over 900km from Toronto, an active and personalised online presence has helped Thunder Bay overcome its geographical isolation and market itself as an appealing destination for newcomers.

The Thunder Bay International and Community Matchmaker project is an initiative of the Northern Policy Institute. The program uses technology to connect migrants already in Canada (including NCP clients) to employers in Ontario's northern regions that are desperately seeking skilled workers. Matchmaker Advisors based in the region provide personalised advice to jobseekers considering making the move.

These consults are usually over the phone or by Skype and can range from simple tips and action plans for job searching, to help starting a business. A large part of the Advisor's role is also to offer local knowledge on what life is like in Thunder Bay. Weather-related questions are common and they even once conducted a video tour of a rental apartment for someone. To jobseekers, Advisors become a familiar and friendly face waiting for them on the other end of the line.

Matchmaker Advisors based in the region provide personalised advice to jobseekers considering making the move.



Welcome



Once newcomers have arrived in a regional community, the retention strategy should focus on making sure they feel welcome. One of the most powerful ways to do this is by building social connections between existing community members and newcomers. When people feel like they belong and are able to participate in the social, cultural, economic and civic life of the community, they will be more likely to want to stay.



Get to know each other

“I like small towns very much. Compared with cities like Stockholm, in small towns I can have contact with people easily and we share our experiences easily. But when I go to Stockholm, I find it hard to have contact with people. They are afraid and go away – I don’t know why. Maybe they are afraid of me.”

– Zerisenay, newcomer from Eritrea in Åre, Sweden



Feeling connected to your neighbours and community leads to higher levels of life satisfaction and ultimately supports your decision to stay in a place. But for people who are new to a town without family or friends, social networks are especially important to reduce isolation and enable access to resources and support.

The well-established social circles in small towns can, however, often make it hard for newcomers to feel part of the community, particularly when there are any added cultural and language barriers. Breaking down these barriers, between townspeople and newcomers, requires intentional strategies and coordination to ensure that people have the chance to get involved in community activities and make new connections.

1. Grow the goodwill

Refugee and migrant support initiatives are often started by a small group of locals who are positive about newcomers coming to their town and are keen for intercultural contact. These locals are the ones who will put themselves forward to get involved with welcoming newcomers. But to ensure that the welcome strategy extends to the whole of the community, regional community members need to find ways to leverage these efforts and grow the goodwill.

Build coalitions of 'people of goodwill' to become your local ambassadors for a welcoming community.

A nucleus of community action

St Joseph, USA

When Somali refugees started relocating to the strongly Catholic and Lutheran town of St Joseph from other parts of the US, the community drew upon its shared Christian value of 'hospitality' to extend a warm welcome. In the quiet, rural Minnesotan town of 7,000 people, Saint Benedict's Monastery and College and Saint John's University formed the nucleus for community action.

Many of the families were vulnerable female-headed households with low levels of English and very isolated from the community. With no settlement services in town, it was up to local community members to help the families get on their feet.

The church called upon its congregation to implement English classes staffed by volunteers, using space in the basement of the college. The university and college established *Circles of Understanding* aimed at building relationships and understanding between students and Somalis and adapted its Liberal Arts curriculum to include a practical service component that encouraged students to get involved. The standing and trust held by these institutions was vital in activating volunteers and building a welcoming and receptive community for the new refugees.

My Community – make yourself at home

Oberallgäu, Germany

In Oberallgäu, Germany, a project intended to drive inclusion in all levels of society through civic engagement was the perfect foundation from which to coordinate refugee support efforts across the region.

The 'Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für alle' (My Community – make yourself at home) project was established by not-for-profit organisation Caritas in 2012 in partnership with the local regional development agency, Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu. The vision for the project was that all people should have the freedom to shape their life, participate in community activities, have equal opportunities and free access to social, political and cultural life, and work.

When refugees started streaming into the region from 2015, there wasn't any time to put services and structures in place. The instant and urgent need of these newcomers relied heavily on volunteers, who came forward in their hundreds to respond. The local working groups established as part of Meine Gemeinde became the ideal means to steer refugee support and inclusion activities.

The Caritas Project Coordinator worked with local government across the region's 28 municipalities to form volunteer teams in each village which could plan and coordinate local activities. While there was initial concern from many locals, once refugees arrived they were greeted as neighbours in need of help. Personal connections broke down fear and galvanised more and more locals to get involved. At the height of the efforts, across the region there were over 1,500 volunteers who came from existing groups, associations and churches.

Caritas' focus was on building the capacity of volunteer teams, continually coming back to the vision of inclusion for all. As a regional coordination point their role included:

- providing guidance and advice to volunteers and responding to questions and concerns

- communicating regular information and updates about refugee arrivals, policies and services
- facilitating inter-municipal communication and coordination
- holding community meetings and information sessions.

Many volunteer teams were initiating innovative projects that weren't immediately visible to surrounding villages. These ranged from clothing distribution centres, to gardening projects and homework tutoring for school kids. Caritas established an online platform called *Inklusjonsmelder* (Inclusion Detector) so local communities could post details of their activities and highlight best practices across the region. This tool helped spark new ideas and connected volunteer teams, building a regional network of mentoring and support.



“Investment in strategic planning and coordination is important. It's not about what roads we can build, it's about how people from all different places can live together in the future. It shouldn't be ‘Come to my village and find your place’, but rather ‘My village is your village’.”

– Dr Armin Ruf, former Integration Project Manager, Caritas



“Norwegian Fire Souls”

Svolvær, Norway

There's a word in Norwegian for that person in town who coaches and runs the sports club, sits on the town council, helps out at the homeless shelter, organises community events and mentors young people, all without asking for a single Norwegian kroner for their efforts – *lidsjeler* or “Fire soul”.

The municipal government in the small town of Svolvær in the remote Northern Lofoten Islands relied upon their *fire souls* when the first refugees started arriving in 2015. They were conscious from early on, however, that the *fire souls* alone would not be enough to ensure that newcomers felt welcomed and included in their new home. So they harnessed the enthusiasm and networks of the *fire souls* to tap into mainstream community groups, sporting clubs, service associations and volunteer networks and get them involved in support efforts.

Developing a volunteer network which brought together representatives from each of these groups for monthly meetings, helped to coordinate community activities, identify gaps and ensure no-one slipped through the cracks.

2. Create meeting spaces

Buddy or mentoring programs have proven to be great ways to build support and friendships for newcomers. But not everyone has the time or interest in one-on-one volunteering. It is also important to create a range of ways for everybody in the community to be exposed to different cultures and connect with newcomers.

Create the space for serendipitous relationships to form.

Språkcafé (Language Café)

Åre, Sweden

The Åre Språkcafé meets weekly on Tuesday nights in the small town of Åre, Sweden. On an average night around 40 newcomers and locals attend. The room at the local parish centre is buzzing with energy and laughter as people of all ages and backgrounds enjoy good conversation, play card games and share food. It's a place where newcomers feel safe and welcomed and is often the first port of call for people when they land in town. When one young African man suddenly found himself without a home, volunteers rallied to offer up their home as temporary accommodation and help the man get on his feet. The connections made at the Språkcafé go beyond developing Swedish language to open up channels of help and create a sense of belonging.



Getting involved in the neighbourhood

Norway

Norwegians aren't known for their small talk. That's why creating opportunities for newcomers and locals to meet over activities such as *dugnad* has been so important. *Dugnad*, or neighbourhood volunteer days, are an important part of Norwegian culture. Twice a year, people come together in apartment blocks, summer homes, schools and workplaces to voluntarily help out with maintenance, spring cleaning and gardening. *Dugnad* has been a great opportunity for newcomers to make connections in the community. It has even helped develop new skills or connections useful for the job market. Getting involved in such an important community event is also a chance for newcomers to give back and feel like they are contributing to their new home.



Building bridges with indigenous communities

Halifax, Canada

As part of creating a welcoming city in Halifax, Canada, Halifax Regional Municipality work with the local indigenous population to create relationships between newcomers and First Nations people. In 2018, Halifax held their first Multilingual Language Fair, showcasing the diversity of languages spoken in the city (including indigenous and other languages existing in the province for generations). The event's huge success highlighted the need and interest in the city to build bridges between existing and newcomer communities.



A friendship through volunteering

Immenstadt, Germany

Hend and Frau Huschka met as volunteers at the Secondhand Clothing Chamber in the Southern German town of Immenstadt in 2017. Frau Huschka established the chamber in 2016 to help distribute clothing to refugees arriving in the town, but its services have now expanded to the entire town. The chamber is staffed entirely by volunteers, including newcomers who are eager for the chance to give back to the local community.

When Hend first arrived in Immenstadt she didn't speak any German and this has made it difficult for her to find work. Volunteering at the Clothing Chamber gives Hend a chance to get out of the house one afternoon a week to meet other women and improve her German language skills.

Frau Huschka and Hend formed a special connection from early on and this has turned into a beautiful friendship. They spend a lot of time in each other's company outside of the Chamber, chatting over Syrian and German home cooking.

3. Harness the power of storytelling

In this interconnected world, we are constantly bombarded with a huge amount of information and messaging. This can lead to misinformation and stereotypes which impact on public perceptions toward refugees. There is great merit in sharing stories to build understanding and support.

Tapping into people's values and emotions is a powerful way to engage and persuade.

Building trust through theatre

Missoula, USA

When the first refugees started arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in Missoula, Montana, they were met by some with apprehension. Most Missoulians had never encountered a refugee from Africa before and found it strange when the newcomers started appearing in buses or around town. Joel Kambale who had been in Missoula for 6 months, decided to put on a play to bring locals through their journey as refugees from DRC.

"When One Becomes Many" told the true stories of six Congolese refugee families and starred recently arrived adults and children living in Missoula. The play was such a success that it was turned into a short documentary which has been screened in towns across the region and become a powerful tool to build understanding.

Engaging the local media

Åre, Sweden

The newcomer integration team in Åre, Sweden partnered with the local newspaper and TV station to share positive news stories of refugees. Showcasing successful examples of refugees in the workplace with employer testimonies generated interest amongst other employers to hire newcomers. The media has also played an important role in highlighting how refugees have contributed to local business growth and jobs creation.

Sharing culture through food

Missoula, USA

Food is a powerful vehicle for storytelling. The United We Eat @home project from Soft Landing Missoula brings unique homemade meals from refugee and migrant chefs directly to the tables of local Missoulians. Takeaway meal orders open online every Friday for pick up the following Wednesday evening. The chef of the week is profiled on the website, allowing customers to get to know a little about their cultural background, passion for cooking and journey to Missoula. At pick up time, friendly exchanges between customers and chefs are an opportunity for people from different backgrounds to interact face to face. This breaks down barriers and highlights the contribution newcomers are making toward building the cultural vibrancy of the town.



“We’re small and don’t have a lot of immigrants here so we don’t have a lot of ethnic food. 150 meals sell out within a matter of hours. That’s been really exciting for people. It’s created an economic opportunity for refugee chefs and it’s created a bridge in our community over the cultural divide.”

– Mary Poole, Soft Landing Missoula

A communications toolkit

Minnesota, USA

The Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioned a communications toolkit on how to reframe refugee resettlement. The toolkit offers a set of framing recommendations in order to build public support and understanding for Minnesota’s refugee resettlement efforts. It recommends emphasising the values of *Shared Prosperity and Human Dignity* to help the public think about the collective benefits to more expansive and welcoming immigration policies. The toolkit is a valuable resource for community groups and organisations working to take control of a positive narrative.



TIPS

- Bring attention to the economic contributions made by newcomers including business growth and jobs creation.
- Highlight the value of cultural diversity to help people to see refugees and migrants as contributors to the cultural attractiveness of your town.
- Find creative ways for newcomers to share their stories and culture.



Focus on jobs and skills

Finding employment is a vital ingredient for successful resettlement but newcomers face extra barriers. Due to conflict and war, many refugees have not had access to education or training opportunities. Others may have been professionals in their home country when they were forced to flee suddenly without the necessary paperwork to prove qualifications and experience. Language barriers are also an added challenge.

It is essential that employers are front and centre in any attraction and retention strategy. They have a critical role to play in providing support to newcomers, leveraging their existing skills and experience and upskilling.

1. Engage the employers

Employers need to see the value of hiring refugees and migrants as a long-term community strategy rather than a stop-gap measure. Investing in settlement and creating welcoming workplaces may take a little extra time and effort for employers but the reward in the form of a loyal, committed and skilled employee is well worth it.

Help employers to recruit, develop and retain a culturally diverse workforce.

“We’re so small that if you do well in your job here, everyone knows. And then it’s easier to get a second one.”

– Worker from Åre Municipality, Sweden

Norrmontage, a supportive workplace

Åre, Sweden

Norrmontage, a substation manufacturer in Åre, Sweden, depends on newcomers to grow its business. Of the 90 employees almost 50% come from a refugee background. The company has worked closely with the local settlement provider to find the right people for jobs that involve operating heavy machinery and attention to detail. With all instructions written in Swedish, language barriers have sometimes been a challenge. Most new employees start out in factory-floor roles but are incentivised to develop their Swedish language and technical skills with opportunities to move around the business as their skills develop. Pairing beginner level speakers with native Swedish speakers on shifts helps to improve their ability. For one hour, two times a week, Norrmontage puts on Swedish language classes during work hours.

Employees also have access to the work gym and there are regular opportunities to get to know colleagues with social activities and gatherings organised outside of work. The investment Norrmontage makes in newcomer employees shows that they are part of the long-term business strategy rather than a short-term fix to meet workforce needs. Nowadays the business does most of their recruitment through word of mouth, tapping into newcomer networks in the workplace to recruit family members and friends.



The Connector Program

Halifax, Canada

Many jobs in regional towns are hidden and aren't visible through the usual advertising channels. The Connector Program in Halifax, Nova Scotia, helps newcomers tap into hidden jobs by building professional networks which include the business community. A new Canadian refugee, migrant or recent graduate (Connectee) is matched with an established business and community leader (Connectors). They get together for 30 minutes in the Connector's workplace or a coffee shop to discuss industry details, skills and areas of expertise, related news, current market demands and hidden job opportunities in Halifax.

Connectors then refer the Connectee to a minimum of three people in their network who may be potential employers, influential industry leaders or other relevant contacts. It is a light touch program which requires a minimal time commitment from the Connector but results in an instant professional network and a foot in the door for the newcomer. Since its launch in 2009, the Connector Program has helped over 1,300 people find jobs. It has now been scaled to 35 communities across Canada.



Employer roundtables

Wellington County, Canada

Wellington County, Ontario, has used employer roundtables to make the business case to local employers for hiring refugees and migrants. Businesses from across the region were invited to an Immigration Summit to consider the economic importance of immigration in rural areas and learn about resources available to help attract and retain newcomer workers.

The County Economic Development Office conducted presentations for employers to inform them about future demographic challenges and the role of immigration in mitigating these challenges. Employers who have hired newcomers shared their experiences and strategies for attracting and retaining a workforce.

Wellington County has found that the best people to convince businesses of the benefits of hiring a culturally diverse workforce and investing in the social integration of employees are other employers. Bringing local businesses together not only helps with sharing successful strategies but can also build an ongoing network of support amongst employers.



TIPS

- Build networks amongst employers to promote the benefits of hiring refugees and share strategies.
- Go beyond the traditional forms of recruitment to reach out to newcomers.
- Provide language supports in the workplace.
- Promote social integration in the workplace by encouraging connections between newcomers and other workers.
- Build relationships between settlement services and employers to advise and support.

2. Utilise and value the skills of newcomers

Getting a job is an integral part of putting down roots in a new community but a fulfilling job is the key. New refugees and migrants often work in different fields than their skills or experience, or at different levels. It is important to help people into longer term career pathways rather than just any job.

Finding ways to utilise transferable skills can lead to increased attraction, retention and business growth.

Tailoring support to the individual

Åre, Sweden

The Newcomer Services team in Åre Municipality, Sweden uses a whiteboard system to track each new refugee's journey for the first couple of years after they arrive in the region. Individual photos of up to 400 newcomers are shifted between different categories which include the orientation program, Swedish classes, education and training courses, and employment in different companies. Vacant jobs are listed in the right column as they arise to help match potential employees. It is a simple yet effective technique which allows staff to retain an individual focus and make sure no one slips through the cracks.

The team also takes every opportunity to get to know their clients. Monthly outdoor recreational activities such as cross-country skiing are not only a way to teach newcomers to enjoy (and stay warm!) in Åre's magnificent nature, but also a way for staff and newcomers get to know one another in a relaxed setting. This is important when it comes to finding the right match for a job.

The team also spends a lot of time working with employers to identify vacancies and understand exactly what kind of employee they are looking for. Knowing the newcomers' skills, work experience and personalities helps place the best person for the job. Thanks to the region's reputation as a world-renowned ski

destination and the growing crowd of mountain bike enthusiasts in the summer, there is no shortage of jobs. While the seasonal nature of work makes it difficult to find year-round employment with one company, the board system helps to coordinate different jobs for people at different times of the year.

The whole system of support for newcomers in Åre is geared toward making an individual welcome which in turn builds on their strengths. 'Former refugees' aren't people to be helped but a vital part of the region's growth and prosperity. In 2010 Åre's population was steadily declining with 10,300 residents but now thanks to the newcomers, it has grown to over 11,200 people.

In Åre, welcoming people means valuing what each and every individual has to offer and finding ways to put this into practice. It is intensive work but you can now find a newcomer working within almost every business across the region. The relationships that have formed between newcomers, their employers and colleagues pay dividends at a social level and boost the community's overall acceptance of newcomers. Of the many newcomers that have arrived in Åre over the past couple of years, 8 out of 10 people are in employment and 90% have stayed in the town.



Farmers Feed the World project

Quinte, Canada

When Quinte Immigration Services (QIS) heard of the hundreds of Syrian refugees with farming backgrounds living in Toronto and looking for work, they came up with a great idea. They established the Farmers Feed the World project which aimed to address the region's severe agricultural labour shortages by recruiting Syrian farmers in Toronto.

QIS hired Arabic speaking staff to help connect with the farmers and held an information session attended by over 150 refugees. Potential employees were screened at the session and when it became clear that many of the jobseekers had literacy challenges having lived most of their lives in remote agricultural regions in Syria, help was brought in for resume writing. Just before the harvest season, QIS hosted a skill-match session, bringing together the assessed refugees with about 14 employers with interpreters on hand to assist with interviews. Over 90 refugees secured work on farms and in the agricultural and food sector.

The program later expanded beyond the region with the launch of an interactive website and a series of video webinars translated into Arabic. This opened up employment opportunities to newcomers living in other parts of Canada and helped provide education on Canadian agricultural practices.



Building an aged care workforce

Bodø, Norway

With many towns around the world experiencing ageing populations, aged care will continue to be a growth sector in need of a workforce. Bodø Municipality Refugee Office in Norway has found an innovative way to address this by integrating Norwegian language classes with on-the-job training in nursing homes. Refugees who are interested in a career in aged care and have a reasonable level of Norwegian language are enrolled in the program which entails 3 days of Norwegian language training, 1 day of health-specific workplace language training and 1 day of work in a nursing home per week. Work placement days increase over the course of the four-year program and participants graduate with a certificate in enrolled nursing.

Most participants start their work placement six months after arriving in Norway. This not only allows helps them to rapidly improve their Norwegian but supports the development of soft skills needed to work in a different cultural context. Employers have reported a high level of satisfaction with the program and that it has been a catalyst for improving practices and policies to be more inclusive of employees from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.



TIPS

- Identify and utilise newcomers' transferable skills through education, training, skills and qualification recognition.
- Design industry-based projects where there are groups of refugees or migrants who have a certain skill set that is needed by your town.
- Support entrepreneurialism and small business start-up.
- Help newcomers develop soft skills such as communication and understanding workplace culture.

Take an inclusion approach

“There was the understanding that if we were successful in making the community more welcoming of newcomers, that would translate to being more welcoming of everybody.”

– David Morris, Owen Sound, Canada

A newcomer should be able to walk into any door of any service or organisation and access the same level of services as anyone else. Taking the time to consider what barriers people face to inclusion and coming up with collective solutions can have lasting impacts on the experience of newcomers and ultimately the entire community.

1. Build the capacity of services

- Inclusiveness and anti-discrimination policies
- Cultural competency/humility training
- Utilising interpreters and translators
- Understanding and accommodating religious needs

Decentralising settlement services

Bruce Grey, Canada

The “Making Grey Bruce Home” project rolled out cultural humility training for 133 services dotted across the rural counties of Grey and Bruce in Ontario, Canada. Cultural humility is a perspective that involves practicing lifelong learning, exercising self-reflection and critique and recognising the dynamics of power and privilege. With an increasing number of refugees and migrants moving to the region and no local settlement organisation in place, it was important to ensure existing services were equipped to meet newcomers’ needs. The project mapped services across the region and developed a training package for services ranging from child and family supports, health clinics and County Government administration staff that ensured identified skills and knowledge gaps were addressed.

“Rather than having one organisation to provide settlement services, we have tried to build a decentralised model where settlement services are provided by different organisations in different communities. We try to help services build their capacity to work with newcomers and include newcomers in their clientele.”

– May Ip, Project Coordinator,
United Way of Bruce Grey



Inclusion in schools

Fredericton, Canada

When the Syrian war broke out, the Canadian province of New Brunswick put its hand up to settle an unprecedented number of refugees. By 2017 its capital, Fredericton, had settled the largest number of refugees per capita in the country – 500 in a city of around 60,000 within the space of a year.

Anglophone West School District, which includes 69 schools, used this influx as a catalyst to develop a new policy approach. After searching long and hard for examples across Canada and overseas, they landed on a policy of inclusion which is now at the core of everything the schools do. Providing inclusive public education means taking a student-centred approach to ensure that every student's experience at school considers their individual strengths and needs. It also means being respectful of diversity and removing any barriers to learning. Educational staff members are provided with extra training and resources to support students from diverse backgrounds.

An example of this can be seen at the Newcomer Support Centre in Greater Fredericton. When newcomers register their children at school they are invited into the centre for a one-on-one appointment to answer questions about the Canadian school system and undertake an assessment of their child's level of English as well as their social history. This helps supports to be linked in from early on and also gives families a point of connection to other useful services and information to ensure every success for their child's educational outcomes.

Anglophone West School District hopes that cultivating a mindset of inclusion which starts with the students, parents and teachers in their schools will help to reinforce broader community acceptance of diversity in Fredericton.

Overcoming housing discrimination

St Cloud, USA

When Somali refugees first started arriving in the small American city of St Cloud, Minnesota they found it hard to find an apartment. Although anecdotally there was a 40% vacancy rate, many newcomers reported discrimination from landlords and found that their applications were constantly refused.

The local settlement organisation, Lutheran Social Services (LSS), set up a Landlord Engagement Committee which brings together St Cloud-based landlords every quarter. At committee meetings, landlords are invited to raise issues and concerns in a safe setting, with LSS staff on hand to share information, strategies and resources. Meetings have also been valuable to inform LSS' education for clients to help avoid future tenancy issues. Thanks in large part to the committee, if you are a Somali in St Cloud it is now much easier to find a rental property.



TIPS

- Focus on building the capacity of what's already in place, rather than creating something new.
- Provide cultural humility training for services and implement changes to policy and practices.
- Leverage specialist knowledge in the region to grow the expertise of others.
- Create networks within sectors to share issues and strategies around inclusion.

2. Help newcomers to navigate the system

Even in a small town, it is not always easy to know where to go for help. When there are added language and cultural barriers, knowing what services are available to assist can be a real challenge.

One-on-one orientation

Åre, Sweden

Every new resident that moves into Åre, Sweden is contacted by staff at the municipality and offered an individual appointment as orientation to their new community. They are provided with an orientation pack with information about local services and programs and invited to drop-in to the office on Tuesdays or Thursdays if any questions come up. Multi-lingual staff are on hand to help with interpretation.



Community Outpost

St Cloud, USA

The Community Outpost in St Cloud, Minnesota, is an innovative model which brings services and supports to the doorstep of the people who need them. It was setup by the St Cloud Police Department in collaboration with the Rotary Club of St Cloud and numerous others in a suburb densely populated by newly-arrived Somali residents.

From the outside, it looks like a typical, two story middle-American home, but venturing inside reveals a friendly community space where newcomers can access employment advice, English classes, health care and even sewing workshops, depending on the day of the week. The building offers up offices and meeting spaces to a diverse range of services to provide a single and convenient point of access and information for local residents. The Community Outpost is open most of the time with a local police officer on site to respond to concerns and greet the stream of school kids who filter in each afternoon seeking free ice-cream.

The concept was a natural fit with the St Cloud Police Department's emphasis on community-oriented policing. They look at problems and their impacts on multiple levels and work to implement solutions as a whole-of-community.

St Cloud Police report that the model has been instrumental in leading to a dramatic drop in local crime rates and increasing trust between the Somali community and police. Another great outcome is the increased collaboration between police and services across St Cloud which helps to improve coordination and ensure no-one slips through the cracks.

In focus:

Fredericton New Brunswick, Canada



Population: 60,000

2 major universities

Promoting themselves as the
'start-up capital of Canada'

In the fastest declining province
in Canada

Seeking to attract 1,000 new
residents a year

Key learning to offer

There is consensus amongst the people of Fredericton of the need to not only attract newcomers, but to make sure they feel welcome so that they stay. A cross-sectoral committee of leaders from government, community and business has formed the nucleus for action and helped maximise efforts through long-term planning, coordination and collaboration. In Fredericton everyone plays a part in welcoming and including newcomers. They know that the future of their town depends on it.

“We have a number of active subcommittees that are specifically working on certain things to improve the settlement and integration of newcomers and immigrants in Fredericton. We try to avoid duplication of activities, we try to build on what’s already in the community.”

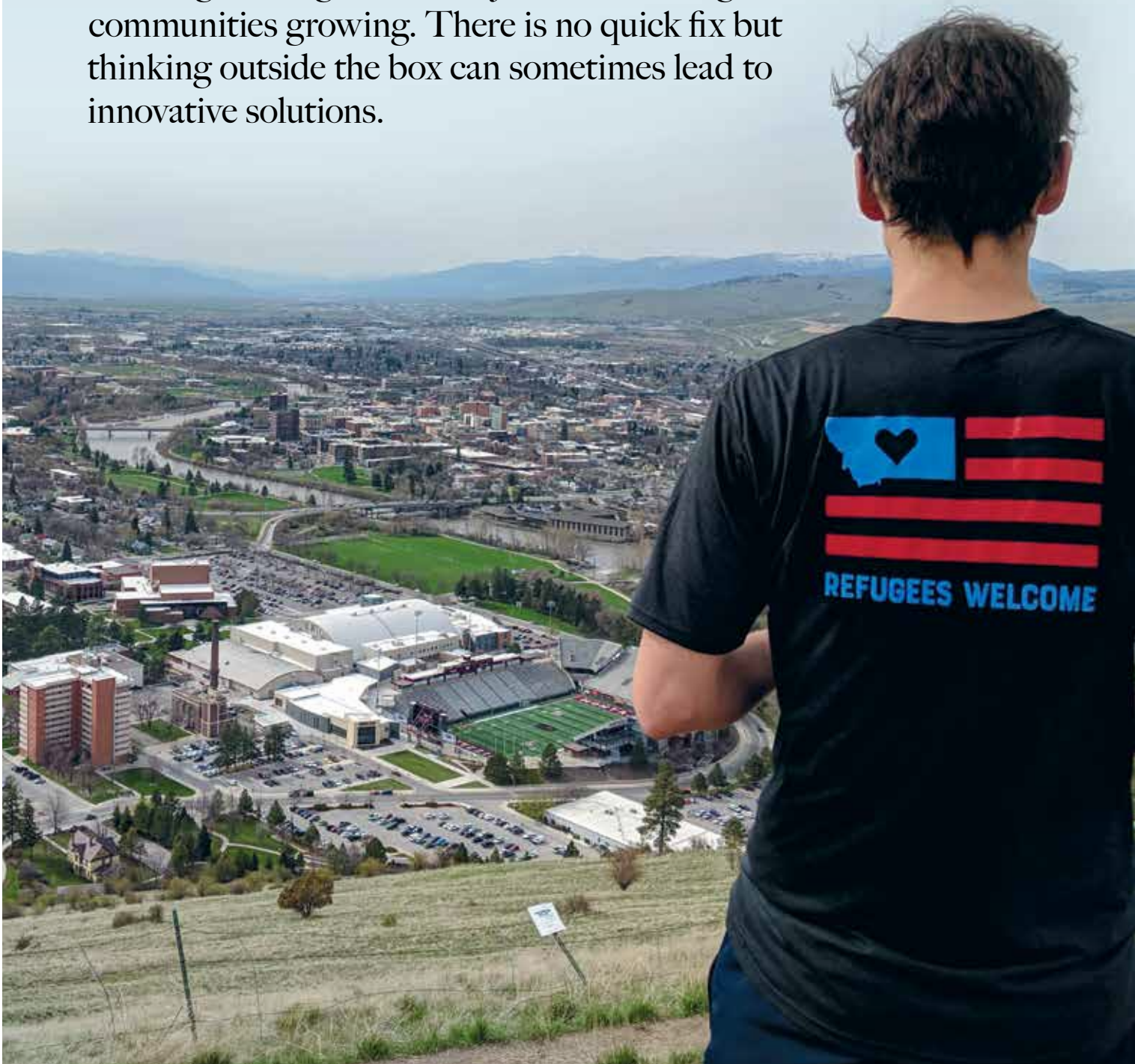
– Amgad Zaky, Ignite Fredericton



Stories from Fredericton on pages 25, 47, 51 and 56

Creative ideas for housing

Housing shortages are a major barrier to regional communities growing. There is no quick fix but thinking outside the box can sometimes lead to innovative solutions.



1.

An expansion of on-campus student accommodation at the two main colleges in St Joseph, Minnesota, left a number of larger apartment complexes in town vacant. The apartments which had been purpose-built to accommodate 4-6 students with multiple bedrooms, bathrooms and gathering spaces, were perfectly sized to house an influx of large, female-headed Somali families moving from other parts of the US.

2.

When refugees first started to arrive in the remote, sparsely populated municipality of Flakstad in the Norwegian Lofoten Islands, a lack of rental housing forced them into isolated homes spread out across the region. Even though most houses in Flakstad were empty, they were being kept as occasional holiday homes by people living on the mainland. The municipal government stepped in to negotiate rental agreements with some of the owners, targeting homes located in the administrative centre of Ramberg close to the supermarket and bus stop. The government now acts as the intermediary, renting out homes to newcomers and working to ensure that people feel as connected as possible.

3.

In Belleville, Canada a severe housing shortage was the unintended consequence of a plan to attract international students and immigrants to the region. The City's first ever Housing Summit identified concrete strategies to increase the supply. These included amending a council bylaw to allow property owners to add second units to their current homes and converting former schools into apartments.

4.

The International Rescue Committee in Missoula, Montana partnered with Airbnb to provide free short-term housing for refugees. As a university town, at certain times of the year it can be very difficult to source private rental accommodation. Through an online platform, Airbnb connects hosts willing to open their homes with families in need until they can transition into long-term housing.

5.

With affordable housing in short supply in Chipman, Canada a village of around 1,000 people, the town's largest employer J. D. Irving (JDI) teamed up with Chipman Council to build an 8-acre subdivision to house migrant workers. This enabled JDI to expand their logging operations business and employ as many as 400 new migrants.



Grow



Over time, the needs of new migrants and refugees in regional towns will change. The community may start to look visibly different with new people, new businesses and other shifts associated with an increased population. Finding ways to keep track of how things are going and addressing issues as they arise can help mitigate challenges. Helping families to feel part of the community is a key strategy to retain newcomers.

Keep growing your community's welcome



Help families to put down roots

1. Invest in children and young people

Many people choose to move to a regional town to give their kids a safe and stable environment in which to grow up. Children and young people who are happy and doing well in their school and community provide an anchor for families.

Quality education for children

Åre, Sweden

When a refugee family was first offered housing in a tiny 150-person town, surrounded by forest, in Åre, Sweden, they hated it and felt isolated and disconnected from the rest of their community. It was their children, who, thriving in the local school and day care centre, convinced their parents not to get on the first bus out. The quality of the town's educational facilities was far greater than in most parts of Sweden and the parents came to realise that it was the right place to be for their children's future.



High school buddy program

Kempton, Germany

The first young refugees to arrive in the ordinarily quiet town of Kempton, Germany, were met with suspicion by their German peers. The young people, mostly from the Middle East and Africa, were enrolled in a specialised German language school close to the local high school. But this had the unintended consequence of segregating the newcomers from other locals their age, leading to tensions among groups. So a high school teacher came up with the idea to initiate a buddy program. Now, each day from 1-2pm, high school students stream into the language school to play games, read and just hang out together. Tensions have been overcome and new friendships have been made.

In focus:

Åre Municipality Jämtland County, Sweden



Population: 11,500

Tourism (skiing in winter,
mountain biking in summer)

Over 800 small businesses

700 refugee arrivals in 5 years

90% newcomer retention rate

Key learning to offer

The extraordinary thing about Åre is not just that they have welcomed around 700 refugees in only 5 years, but that they have a 90% retention rate. What keeps people in Åre is a strong sense of belonging and connection to the community. You can find a newcomer working in nearly every business in town and this is where many friendships are formed. There is a big focus on helping newcomers into year-round employment given the high number of seasonal jobs.

“I think the key ingredient in Jämtland County, Sweden is that we really want to do this. We want to do a good job. We want to welcome refugees and people coming from all over the world to our place. And we feel a pride. We feel very proud of our place and we want to share it with more people. We would like more people to be able to enjoy our town as much as we do.”

– Hanna Moback, Åre Municipality



Stories from Åre on pages 2, 18, 36, 39, 40, 42, 44, 48, 52 and 54

2. Reach out to spouses

Many initiatives are skewed towards the breadwinner of the family and fail to take into account the needs of their spouse. When spouses are engaged and supported, families are more likely to stay.

Employment for spouses

Flakstad, Norway

The *From Seasonal Worker to Flakstad Inhabitants* project in Norway interviewed over 100 seasonal workers to understand what it would take to get them to relocate to Flakstad permanently. The region has no difficulty attracting workers from Eastern Europe, who fly in for 3-4 months at a time, for well paid jobs in cod fisheries. With less than 1,300 inhabitants across 20 villages, and only 90 children in the primary and secondary school, however, Flakstad is struggling to stay alive. The interviewed workers revealed that a job for their spouse was the most important factor in deciding whether or not to relocate permanently to the region. This insight is now being used to focus on sourcing employment for workers' spouses as a major retention strategy.



Sourcing appropriate child care

Åre, Sweden

The *Newcomer Services* team in Åre, Sweden try to help every member of the family to find work as soon as possible. For some women with before-school-aged children, a lack of trust in the child care system has affected their uptake of readily (and cheaply) available child care support in their new home. Many of the newcomer women come from cultures where it is unheard of to leave children with people they don't know. For others, trauma from their refugee experience means they are reluctant to be separated from their kids. The Services team have worked closely with women to sensitively address their concerns. Engaging other women from the same cultural background who have used the child care has been helpful in building trust in the Swedish childcare system.



TIPS

- Don't forget employment for spouses. Couples are unlikely to stay if only one of them has a fulfilling job.
- Help women to access affordable child care.
- Find ways to help women get involved with social activities and reduce isolation.



Keep an eye on things

1. Provide safe spaces to hear concerns

Communities need to plan for things to go wrong and take concerns seriously. It is important to provide opportunities for locals to raise issues in a non-judgemental environment.

Responding to rapid change

St Cloud, USA

In the predominantly white town of St Cloud in central Minnesota, an influx of Somalis, the majority of whom are Muslim, has stoked fears and led to deep community divisions. Up to 10,000 Somalis have moved to St Cloud, a town of 70,000 people, in the past 10 years. Some parts of the community are concerned at the rate of change in their town and they are explicit and vocal in sharing their views. Many of these concerns have been conflated with racist and xenophobic conspiracies, invigorated by the rising far-right, anti-immigration discourse in the USA. It is not uncommon for Somalis to be the target of racist attacks and encounter discrimination in their day-to-day lives.

This is only a small part of the story, though. On the whole, Somalis in St Cloud are thriving and they have brought economic and social regeneration to a once dying town. A 2018 report from the *Minnesota Budget Project* documented a high workforce participation rate and relatively high median income amongst immigrants in St Cloud.⁵

Storytelling has been important in helping reframe Somali residents as new citizens who have enriched the community. Mayor of St Cloud, Dave Kleis, and other respected community leaders take every opportunity to highlight their contributions to the town. They also meet individually with concerned citizens to provide a safe space for issues to be discussed.

The local newspaper, *The St Cloud Times*, ran a series of fact checks to debunk myths about refugees and immigrants. A volunteer organisation called *Unite Cloud* addresses cultural tensions and builds understanding through hosting community forums and social media campaigns.

“Every time I talk to couples, families and people that don’t really accept us and tell them that I lived in a refugee camp and now I’m here, finishing my Master’s degree in Public Administration, with a business that employs 32 people, and my wife who’s a professional midwife – they look at us and see we’re just like them.”

– Abdi Daisane, Somali American business owner in St Cloud, Minnesota



5. https://www.mnbudgetproject.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/minnesota-immigrant-contributions-cd6.pdf?sfvrsn=dc5309e8_6



TIPS

- Balance discussions about the benefits of newcomers with a recognition of the fears that established community members may have.
- Where possible, meet with concerned community members one-on-one, unpack and listen to their concerns.
- Have a plan in place for when things go wrong.
- Develop communications strategies to alleviate and respond to community fears.

2. Manage community expectations

There is sometimes a mismatch between the expectations of community members, and the reality of newcomers' experiences in regional towns. It is important to engage the community in an ongoing conversation to help keep expectations realistic and counter any disappointment when things don't go as planned.

Finding the right fit

Missoula, USA

When the first refugees in Missoula decided to move away after only a few short months there was much disappointment. The local community had tried their best to make sure they felt welcomed and at home and saw it as a sign of failure. In fact, it was a range of factors, outside of the community's control, that persuaded the new refugees to move elsewhere. Coming direct from sub-Saharan Africa, some found Montana's bitterly cold winter difficult to deal with. A few with high medical needs were forced to relocate close to specialised medical services not available in Missoula. For others, not having a church in Missoula where they could practice their faith was the deal breaker.

Those who have stayed have learned to adjust to Missoulia life and tried to embrace even the challenging parts of their new home. They are the pioneers who have weighed up their options and decided they are willing to sacrifice some things for the sense of community, job opportunities and safe future Missoula offers their family. As more people from the same country have arrived, some of the initial challenges have become easier. The Congolese community now have enough people to establish a local church. There are experienced people on hand to

advise newcomers on how to dress warmly and navigate daily life in thick snow. Having others close by who share the same language and culture helps newcomers feel better connected.

Even though it's still sad when people decide to move away, many Missoulians have come to appreciate that successful settlement is just as much about finding the right fit for refugees, as it is for their town.

Building the capacity of volunteers

Fredericton, Canada

When the Canadian Government pledged to welcome an extra 25,000 Syrian refugees in the space of a year, private community sponsorship groups started popping up in small towns across the country. The pace at which the refugees started arriving in Canada caught many including policy makers off guard. The community sponsorship program placed the responsibility for initial financial and settlement support on volunteer sponsors. However, there was little training or guidance available to assist the well-intentioned volunteers with their role. In some small towns which were far away from specialist settlement supports and resources this posed challenges and led to conflict between the expectations of sponsors and refugees.

In the Province of New Brunswick, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton responded by hiring a part-time coordinator to engage with sponsor groups in small towns across the region. Volunteers were offered cultural humility training and supported with techniques on how to help empower and build the independence of their sponsored refugees.



TIPS

- Help newcomers weigh up whether your town is the right fit for them.
- Message to your community from early on that if people decide to move on, this is not a sign of failure.
- Realise it takes time to attract newcomers and build a welcoming community.
- Respect the agency of newcomers to make decisions that are right for them.

Political participation is a sign of success



“The immigrant communities need to have a say at the table where decisions are made. They need to not just get accepted in their community, but also represent the community as voters and elected officials themselves. We have diverse ideas that we can bring to the table.”

– Abdi Daisane, Somali American business owner in St Cloud, Minnesota



“Newcomer attraction and retention requires active involvement from the *whole of the community and government, working together.*”



Key policy recommendations to consider

1.

Involve people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in all elements of attraction and retention initiatives and policy making.

2.

Implement place-based approaches which involve all levels of government, community and business. Doing so could break down information and program silos, thereby enhancing efficiency and potential resource and knowledge sharing.

5.

Develop a more strategic approach to engaging with migrants and refugees in cities to actively market regional employment and lifestyle opportunities.

6.

Help regional employers to recruit, develop and retain a culturally diverse workforce.

This report has identified key lessons and innovative strategies that can be adopted by regional towns looking to build their population through secondary migration.

Although it is important that all efforts are led by the local community from the ground-up, there is an opportunity for government to better support this process.

3.

Invest in social capital building and creating connections between newcomers and community members.

4.

Build the capacity of mainstream services and programs to meet the specific needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

7.

Demonstrate leadership by communicating the benefits of immigration and the contribution migrants and refugees make to society. Investing in community consensus building and preparedness is a key determinant of newcomer retention.



Acknowledgements

List of organisations visited

Canada

- Ignite Fredericton
- Multicultural Association of Fredericton
- Anglophone West School District
- Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council
- Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)
- Canadian Government – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Australian High Commission, Canada
- Quinte Immigration Services
- Rural Ontario Institute
- University of Guelph
- County of Wellington
- Government of Ontario
- Newcomer Centre of Peel
- County of Grey
- United Way of Bruce Grey
- Arden Language Centre

United States of America

- Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
- City of St Cloud
- Create CommUNITY
- Unitecloud
- Cultural Bridges, St Joseph
- United Way of Central Minnesota
- Stearns County Health
- Avivo Employment Services, St Cloud
- St Cloud Landlord Engagement Committee
- St Cloud Police Department
- Global Center, St Cloud
- Blooming Kids Child Care Center, St Cloud
- Greater Minnesota Worker Center
- Northway Family Centre
- International Rescue Committee
- City of Missoula
- Soft Landing Missoula
- Job Service Missoula

Germany

- Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu
- Oberallgäu District Government
- Caritasverband Kempten-Oberallgäu
- Berufsschule Kempten
- IQ-Netzwerk Bayern

Norway

- Nordland County Government
- Bodø Municipality
- Bodø Red Cross
- Husbanken, Bodø
- NAV, Bodø
- Nordland Research Institute
- Refugee Dormitory, Tverlandet
- Bodø Voksenopplæring Adult Education
- Livsglede for Eldre Retirement Home, Bodø
- Vågan Municipality
- Svolvær Secondary School
- Vestågøy Municipality
- Vestågøy Secondary School
- SALT Consulting (Lofoten)
- Flakstad Municipality

Sweden

- Åre Municipality
- Åre Språkcafé
- Mörsil Språkcafé
- Notvallen Retirement Home, Järpen
- Swedish for Immigrants SFI, Järpen
- Norrmontage
- N-clean
- Åredalens Folk High School

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Final Words

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And finally, to those who read this report, I thank you for taking an interest in how regional towns can attract, welcome and retain people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. I hope my research gives you ideas that you can try in your own community and that it reminds you that you are not alone in your endeavour. There are many regional communities around the world facing similar challenges and the more we connect and learn from one another, the stronger our future will be.

About the author



Talia Stump has over 10 years' experience working to enhance the wellbeing and inclusion of refugee communities through policy, research and practice. She is a strong advocate for cross-sectoral collaboration and embedding community development principles in policy and program design.

Talia has held a range of positions within the community sector, academia and government. She currently works as Principal Policy Officer Settlement for the New South Wales (NSW) Government where she is overseeing the design and implementation of a new approach aimed at supporting regional communities to attract and retain newcomers.

Talia holds a Master of Social Work, Master of Development Studies (Refugees and Displacement) and Bachelor of Arts (Asian Studies).

If you would like to discuss any of this research further, get in touch with an organisation mentioned in this report or collaborate on a project, please email your request to taliastump@gmail.com

You can also find more information about this research at www.citytocountryproject.com

“If there is one thing this Fellowship has taught me, it's that out of tough times, compassion, resourcefulness and creativity flourish.”

– Talia

citytocountryproject.com

