

Solution: New Canadian Employment Directory

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Introduction

Canada is a great place to live right? With Kitchener Waterloo being a growing hub for tech companies, housing development and a region that is perfect for raising a family. What better place to land for someone new to Canada! Or is it?

Through our research and learning about affordable housing, we came to understand and were surprised, that for an immigrant new to Canada, it is sadly not always a great place to live.



Having a roof over our heads, a clean and safe place to live, is a human right. However, for many immigrants arriving in Canada, including Waterloo Region, finding such a home is not always easy. Whether lack of supply or too costly to afford, finding that safe, clean home is a challenge for many.

Often, affording a home is directly related to income, which is related to the type of employment a new immigrant is able to obtain. Even those who are educated in their own country, may discover that their education does not transfer easily, if at all to a similar position here in Canada. Add in language barriers, cost to re-certify or re-educate; the ability to find a job earning more than minimum wage, finds some new immigrants going down the path of requiring social assistance and joining the long waitlist of people needing affordable housing.

The fact is, Canada needs new immigrants to support its natural growth, so we sought out to find creative solutions to how immigrants new to our Region, could have a place to go, obtain employment and step out of social assistance, off the list for affordable housing and begin their life in Canada, happy, self-sufficient and contributing members of their new home.

One way to do this is through employment connections and opportunities in the construction industry.

Who We Spoke To

Through our research we were encouraged in our conversation with Jeff VanGysel at Just Working Construction Inc. He has a successful program that supports new immigrants who are either skilled labourers or un-skilled labourers, who are willing and able to work. His belief and values as an employer, have led to opportunities for new immigrants to find employment, even if they don't speak English.



Through building connections between new immigrant employees and those who speak English, offering fair and equal wages, Jeff has created opportunities for his workers to belong, feel valued, contribute and afford their own home or ability to rent, without the need for affordable housing or social assistance.

While the program and support Jeff has created for those new to our country and region is wonderful, there are not enough companies providing the same opportunities and that is what we would like to fix, through the database.

Throughout our research we spoke with several other individuals and organizations, who are working with new immigrants who arrive into Waterloo Region. The story was always the same.... There are not enough resources, there is no one place to go for immigrants to gain all of the information and support they need, and there is not enough funding for those new to our country, allowing them a great start in the place they now call home.

We found that while places like The Working Centre, Immigrant Services, Community Centre Outreach or Settlement workers, along with many other organizations, were doing their best, often the programs and supports were quite segregated and often not working together.

Many programs are occurring, offering translated courses, but often in only a few languages, which may support one group of new immigrants, but not all equally. Waterloo Region has 120 different languages and programs and translation services need to reflect this need.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016 by Census Division



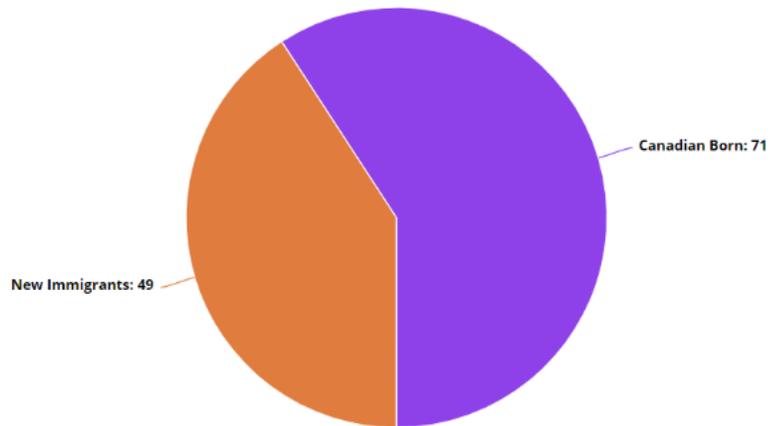
Individuals and Organizations

Name	Organization
Jeff VanGysse	Just Working Construction Inc.
Bahaa	Employee at Just Working Construction Inc.
Nora Whittington	Immigration Partnership
Safa Qoussini	Conestoga College
Helen Ala Rashi	ShamRose
Majd	The Working Centre
Dianne Piluk	Family Outreach Worker – House of Friendship
Mike Farwell	570 News
Mark Nery and Leah Logan	Indwell

What We Learned

The Region of Waterloo is one of the fastest growing urban areas in the entire country and as such will require more housing. We will need to recruit 100,000 workers by 2029 at the rate we are currently growing.

- In 2016, only 49% of new immigrants were employed compared to 71% of Canadian Citizens.
- Between 2000 and 2004, 25% to 40% of new immigrants accessed social services compared to 8% of Canadian Citizens.
- Ontario needs 100,000 workers by 2029
- Ontario's construction and maintenance sectors are currently operating at full capacity.
- New immigrants regularly struggle to find employment earning more than minimum wage
- New immigrants face barriers when not able to speak English and there are not enough translated courses available, making any re-certification extra challenging



Challenges

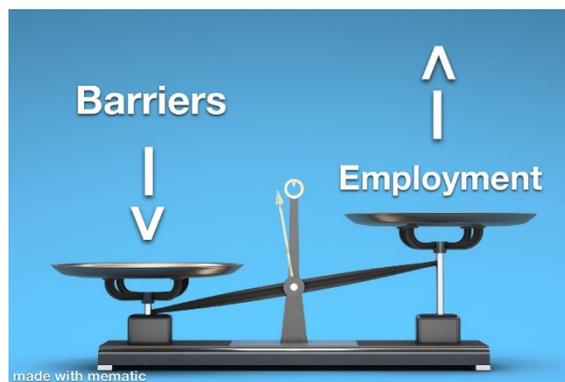
- Currently no “one-stop-shop” for either new immigrants or Employees to go where required information is stored
- The time it takes to obtain English language requirements is prohibitive to many who need employment now
- Certifications earned in other countries are not valid in Canada, increasing time and costs before a new immigrant is able to work
- Courses currently offered at local Colleges are in either English or Arabic, limiting those who come from other countries
- Not enough skilled or unskilled labourers to keep up with demand from employers

Even with the challenges, there is definitely a sense of hope, a desire to help and learn and provide opportunity for immigrant families, with each agreeing that a database, or “one-stop-shop” supporting both employers, immigrants and organizations supporting them, would be a valuable tool that could be used effectively and support our goal of helping new immigrants find employment as a way to remove barriers and allow for self-sustaining home ownership or rental ability.



What is Missing

- Programs in multiple languages
- Communication between organizations supporting new Canadians
- Database or “one-stop-shop” for both employers and employees
- Regional resources for new immigrants related to training, English language learning related to required certifications
- Programs for all construction companies to have a buddy system, where one person speaks English and can translate for those that do not
- Government support for both construction companies who need labourers and for new immigrants requiring training prior to working



Proposed Solution

Our proposal is to build a database that supports both new immigrants looking for employment, who have limited or no English but are ready to work, as well as connecting employers who are looking for skilled and unskilled labourers.

The database will need to be:

- Accessible in many languages
- Supported by programs like the Working Center, St. Louis School, Immigration Services and the Workforce Planning Board.



Goals of database

Employer	Employee
Allow employers easy access to potential employees as they build their team	Able to act as translators or work alongside translator to complete the job
Show employees certifications and previous experience	Categories that cover spoken language for ease of use
Provide one place for a company to go to find employees	List required certifications and experience needed

Intended Outcomes

Our goal is to reduce the number of new immigrants who need social assistance by removing barriers that they face in obtaining employment and increasing the number of workers in housing thereby effectively increasing housing supply.

The database we are proposing would provide a tool for:

New Immigrants to register and list their skills, qualifications, certificates, level of English and connect with translators and potential employers.

Organizations supporting new immigrants would have one place to go, allowing ease for sourcing job opportunities for their clients, find translation services, develop connections and share resources.

Employers would have one place to go and immediately be able to connect with possible employees, either skilled or unskilled, providing jobs and the ability to complete housing projects in a timely manner.

- Database supporting employers and employees in construction and trades
- Increased language options for training and certifications
- Government programs supporting companies who employ new Canadians
- Government programs supporting new immigrants during their time in school as they upgrade their skills to meet Canadian standards and/or learn English
- Increase in employment for new immigrants, thereby decreasing their need for social assistance
- Increase company's ability to keep up with housing demand because there is enough labourers

Potential Financial Implications

- New immigrants able to come off social assistance and ideally afford to rent or buy
- Increased housing being built, providing more options for all persons, and decreasing social assistance requirements
- Increased income allowing individuals to add to economy
- Increasing housing supply
- Regional growth
- Increased employment opportunities

By simply providing employment opportunities, we would naturally target the social determinants of health for new immigrant families as well as decrease their children's adverse childhood experiences. All of which decrease the future need for social services, medical and health care. Having families who are able to sustain themselves financially increasing belonging, creates less financial strain on government programs and better health outcomes for our new immigrant families.

Suggested Partners

- Member of Regional government
- Community Centres
- Immigration Waterloo Region
- Workforce Planning Board
- Construction Companies
- Conestoga College
- Outreach and Settlement Workers, etc.

Other Resources

- Statistics Canada
- MLS Housing Price Index, January 2015 to April 2021
- <https://www.thestar.com/business/opinion/2020/02/06/three-ways-to-fix-the-skilled-workers-shortage.html>
- www.regionofwaterloo.ca
- <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/resources/Census/Census-Bulletin-4-Language-access.pdf>

