



ST. THOMAS · ELGIN  
Local Immigration Partnership

# MOVING FORWARD

BUILDING WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



2019



# BUILDING WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

## OUR VISION

St. Thomas and Elgin County communities will be a culturally diverse, welcoming, caring, and inclusive community that will retain current residents, welcome newcomers, and provide them the opportunity to successfully integrate, contribute to, and benefit from social, cultural, and economic inclusion.

## OUR MISSION

St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) is a progressive network that promotes and supports inclusion.

## OUR PRINCIPLES

To ensure that the work of those associated with the initiative promotes inclusivity, the following principles have been adopted:

**INCLUSIVITY** – The work of the Council and the members of working committees will be inclusive of all immigrants in the St. Thomas-Elgin community regardless of their immigration status, citizenship, age, gender, health status, sexual orientation, and number of years in the community. The Council shall work towards equal participation while promoting social justice.

**COLLABORATION** – A working relationship will be developed between the host community and the immigrant community to build a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment.

**EMPOWERMENT** – Our work will strive to promote new immigrants' capacity to live their lives with the ability to be economically stable, live in adequate housing, and provide for themselves and their families through their own means and their own decisions.

**SUSTAINABILITY** – A plan shall be developed to ensure that the work of the STELIP Council will continue to make improvements to immigrants' experiences and the community as a whole.

## STELIP COUNCIL

Abe Harms	Mennonite Community Services
Bob Hammersley	St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
Cindy Hastings	St. Thomas Economic Development Corporation
Dana Vanzanten	St. Thomas Public Library
Debra Mountenay	Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
Jackie Van Ryswyk	Employment Services Elgin
Jeff Kinsla	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Jeffery Robinson	Thames Valley District School Board
Judith Wiley	Central Community Health Centre
Juliane Hundt	YWCA St. Thomas Elgin Settlement Services
Kate Burns Gallagher	Elgin County Economic Development
Mark Maseo	Elgin Business Resource Centre
Mark Tinlin	City of St. Thomas
Mike Amato	Fanshawe College
Sandra Poczobut	Elgin County Library

## STELIP PROJECT TEAM

Tom Sproat	STELIP Project Facilitator
Petrusia Hontar	STELIP Project Coordinator
Shelley Harris	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Director of Education and Settlement

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In its eight years of existence, St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) has continually expanded their connections and outreach into the community. These efforts were particularly evident this year with new networks established with local secondary schools and the regional school board, with the latter committing a representative to the STELIP Council.

STELIP has also been working on strategic planning using the Theory of Change Model to guide and focus the work of the partnership. In the previous years the six priority areas have been informing the initiatives of STELIP. The Theory of Change Model will pivot the work of STELIP and focus the vision of building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive communities to ensure that goals are driven by outcomes. This shift will allow for enhanced measurement of the work the community, of partners, and stakeholders are doing to support newcomers.

The work of STELIP is organized under the six priority areas and led by the STELIP Council:



Improve the Coordination of Information between Services



Increase Awareness and Access to Appropriate Employment, Entrepreneurship and Labour Market Supports



Promote and Enhance Settlement and Integration of Newcomers



Increase Access to English Language Learning and Literacy



Promote Public Awareness of Diversity and Inclusion



Access and Analyze Data to Inform Priorities and Activities



## BELONGING

Everyone wants to feel like they belong and contribute to their community. Often immigrants struggle to build their sense of community when they move to a new place. To build a communal sense of belonging, long-time residents could play an active role in creating an environment where newcomers can feel welcome. STELIP invited community members to reflect and share their interpretation of belonging and filmed their perspectives; the videos were edited into montages to create the **"Belonging"** video series for distribution over social media. We thank the community for taking part in the initiative and remind everyone of the benefits when we all act to welcome individuals new to the area and Canada.



## NEWCOMER CHAMPION AWARDS

STELIP hosted their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Newcomer Champion Awards (NCA) at the Streamliners Espresso Bar in recognition of the efforts made by area-residents in building *Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive* communities. Three awards were handed out, including the Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion award (given to both an individual and group/organization), and the Newcomer Leader Award. Achieving the mission of STELIP is impossible without the work of the community, and recognizing outstanding leaders is important for validating their work and encouraging them to continue.

## APRIL

### CANADA THROUGH MY LENS

Settling in a new community is an emotional experience that can be difficult to explain with words. STELIP created a project for immigrants to learn the basics of photography and editing to help share their story through pictures. The photos and descriptions were compiled into a photovoice exhibit for the Railway City Arts Crawl in 2018. The content of the photovoice exhibit was so well received and compelling that it was taken on a tour around the Elgin County Library system and is currently featured at the Elgin Business Resource Centre.



## MAY

### LOW GERMAN NETWORKING

STELIP has been attending this conference and networking event since 2011 and has facilitated many positive connections with the community. STELIP works in the community to help build bridges with the Low-German speaking Mennonite community and various agencies. The information shared at these events helps increase understanding of this cultural group. Contacts made at this year's event resulted in a new STELIP Council member from the Thames Valley School Board as well as a successful grant proposal from the Law Foundation of Ontario.





## WORKFORCE PLANNING SUMMIT

STELIP has been connected with the Local Employment Planning Council since its formation and has actively encouraged the inclusion of immigrants within their strategies. The workforce planning summit was an event to help visualize the connections that already exists across planning bodies, and to connect other groups that are a natural fit. This was a validating exercise completed for the entire London Economic Region that highlighted the multitude of connections STELIP has developed.



## MULTICULTURALISM DAY

This is the second year STELIP celebrated *Multiculturalism Day* in St. Thomas, a city that's home to immigrants from over 40 different countries, with recent immigrants from over 10 countries (US, Philippines, Lebanon, UK, Colombia, Australia, China, Mexico, Cuba, and various unlisted countries in Asia and Africa) arriving between 2011 and 2016. The celebrations began by raising the STELIP flag at City Hall and continued with a BBQ accompanied with music and activities.



# JUNE

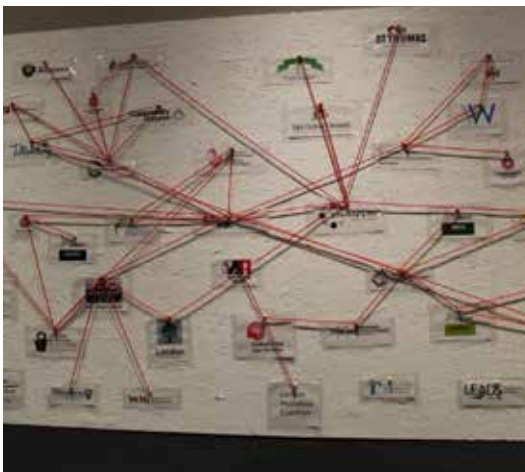
## #CULTURELIVESHERE

In celebration of Multiculturalism Day, STELIP produced a video that showcased some of the cultural diversity that is thriving in the community. Videos were taken of residents waving flags of their countries of origin. The videos were then shared on social media on Facebook and Instagram and also at the local Tim Hortons, OnRoute, and Cineplex Odeon for the week of Multiculturalism Day. The campaign used the hashtag #CultureLivesHere and reached over 3800 Facebook views, an excellent result on expanding our cultural diversity awareness.



## SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT – WORLD REFUGEE DAY

This past year saw considerable inroads made with area schools, with STELIP staff visiting classrooms to present on topics relating to newcomers and immigration, and engaging the students in discussing their own questions. For World Refugee Day, STELIP, a member of the YWCA Settlement Services, and a former refugee now living in St. Thomas were invited to visit Aldborough Public School to speak to their social justice group. The former refugee shared their story of coming to Canada, offering the students a valuable glimpse into the motivations of someone escaping truly dire circumstances.







## LIFE AS A REFUGEE

On June 20, World Refugee Day, STELIP, YWCA, and MCS Settlement Services were excited to once again attend the *Life of a Refugee Conference* in London. Organized and hosted by many partners across the region, this annual event is always a terrific opportunity to hear inspiring stories, network with peers, and engage in professional development. The Elgin-St. Thomas community possesses over 20 years of experience with refugee resettlement and has shown to be flexible and innovative in meeting the needs of sponsors and families to support the initial and long-term settlement into this small, rural community.



## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Education and conversation is essential to overcoming rumours and misinformation in the community. Topics surrounding immigration are often misrepresented and based on assumptions. To help the local community gain a better understanding, a *Community Conversation* event was held to provide accurate information on topics related to immigration and diversity, and to provide a forum through which attending residents could voice questions and concerns in open and judgement-free discussion. Community Conversations was held at the CASO station in St. Thomas, with three experts to speak on topics relating to immigration and diversity, specifically Islam, the media, and the economic impact of immigration, respectively. The event filled the room to capacity and ran over-time, owing largely to the enthusiastic engagement of the attending public during the Q&A session, a clear indication of the public's keen interest in the subject matter. It was very encouraging to see so many community members show an interest in this event, and stay tuned for information about the second installment!

## JULY/AUGUST

### SPRINGFIELD LIBRARY

Though some community initiatives may slow down in the summer months, the *TD Summer Reading Club* offered in the Springfield Library invited STELIP to share our passion for Cultural Diversity with their youth participants. In the hour session we learned and practiced greetings in many languages, explored cultural crafts, and sampled some delicious foods. Engaging youth in exploring and appreciating cultures helps to create an environment of acceptance and respect. STELIP continually seeks to find ways to engage local youth in initiatives and projects.



## SEPTEMBER

### CULTURE DAYS

As a part of the national Culture Days, STELIP partnered with the STEAM Centre to deliver a day of programming developed around the 2018 Culture Days theme of OnBeat (sic). Visiting members of the public were invited to try their hand at building a simplified version of a cultural drum, before dipping their drumstick in paint and creating a colourful design across the face of their drumhead. The hands-on and frankly messy nature of the activity proved to be a hit with the children!





## FANSHAWE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

STELIP partnered with Fanshawe to welcome their new international students. The college's enrollment of international students occurs in a cyclical nature with this year seeing a large enrollment. This means that the supports for these students are not as established as the supports that are in place in London. More supports are required in the community for landlord and tenant relations as well as connecting the students to more social and community opportunities.



## WALK WITH ME

Since the inception of STELIP in 2011, our annual *Walk With Me* networking workshop has been one of our flagship events, drawing dozens of representatives each year from across the social services. The 2018 *Walk With Me* attracted the largest crowd of attendees to date, with nearly 90 people attending, most of them for the first time. This year focused on the topic of trauma informed care in addition to a panel discussion on system navigation, while also featuring the perennial agency trade show, a centerpiece of the event since 2011.

# OCTOBER

## CLEO FALL FORUM

Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) hosted their annual *Fall Forum for Community Workers* in Toronto, with both small-group discussions and guest presentations on emerging legal strategies, tools and policy surrounding marginalized populations in the community. STELIP staffs, already involved with CLEO in the development of a legal podcast, attended the event and were thoroughly impressed with the breadth and relevance of the day's content.



## IRCC COMMUNITY PLANNING AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

STELIP supported the regional Community Planning and Community Consultations for IRCC. These meetings were implemented across Canada, the information being used to inform the call for proposal and contract amendments for the upcoming fiscal years. It is important to include the rural context into the federal government's planning. Rural communities have different needs and considerations that that impact our strategies and activities.







## EARLY ON CENTRES

The local Early ON centre is preparing for the transition to the Ontario Early Years Centres and Family Centres model. They have recently seen an increased number of immigrant clients and connected with STELIP to help align their work to better support these families. Some items that will be put into place include increasing information about Settlement Services, including different languages in their welcome sign, and adding some educational opportunities for English vocabulary for parents and children.



## REGIONAL FORUM: RURAL NEWCOMER INTEGRATION

STELIP attended as Grey County and several supporting partners organized and hosted a forum on rural newcomer integration in Collingwood, addressing areas of affordable housing, employee attraction, and diversity and intercultural competency in the workplace and human resources system. Forums like these are important for maintaining a current awareness of the ongoing work and ideas of peers in the industry, and can often play an integral role in the future direction of STELIP's work.



# NOVEMBER

## BRANTFORD NEWCOMER CONNECTIONS SYMPOSIUM

The municipality of Brantford hosted a symposium to help inform key stakeholders of the needs and experiences of newcomers, and to learn about the initiatives of surrounding communities. This community does not currently have a LIP working to strengthen the supports available and as a result are looking at more grass roots solutions. STELIP shared some of the work they have done to help build welcoming communities. Representatives from the Waterloo and Hamilton LIP also participated in the event. The Brantford residents were very grateful for the knowledge sharing.



## PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY – NATIONAL CONFERENCE

STELIP staff travelled to Montreal to attend the annual *Pathways to Prosperity Conference*, which attracts academics, Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), and various other agency staff for a weekend of presentations, discussion, and networking. Worth noting were topical presentations on the value of immigration to Canada's labour market and the politicization of Canadian immigration. Guest speaker and author of *The Boat People*, Sharon Bala, incorporated story-telling in her presentation. As well, it was valuable to hear reports by colleagues throughout the LIP national network on ongoing initiatives and programs that improve the settlement and integration of newcomers across the country.



#CULTURELIVESHERE





## LABOUR MARKET IMPACT ASSESSMENT REGIONAL PROTOCOL

STELIP responded to the need for a local protocol to support employers interested in hiring international workers. This emerged as several employers inquired about the processes required to retain an international student and another to bring in a highly skilled professional. STELIP and representatives from economic development have initiated discussions on how to best address this service-gap, drawing upon comparable programs offered in nearby locations including Windsor and London. The ability for local businesses to successfully attract the talent they need is integral to the future of the region, and STELIP is pleased that the creation of a protocol to support this has begun in earnest.



## WESTERN REGION WORKFORCE FORUM

STELIP attended a one day forum to help build solutions for current workforce issues. The presentations included topics like rural immigrant attraction, online workforce attraction, and youth retention. This event brought together representation from the Western Region to share and discuss unconventional solutions, best practices, and community collaboration strategies to enhance the integration experience of newcomers.

# DECEMBER

# JANUARY

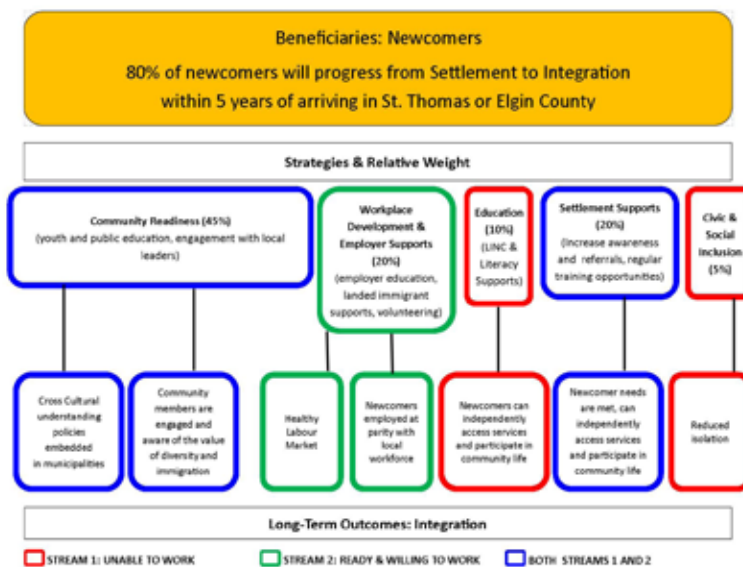
## STRATEGIC PLANNING

STELIP helps bring the voice of immigrants to the community, especially when large community groups are undergoing strategic planning. With the hospital undertaking strategic planning, the opportunity to help voice the barriers to service provision for immigrants arose. Concerns like increased access to interpretation, more attention to successful referrals, and stronger links to local settlement agencies were recommended. STELIP is currently engaged in their own strategic planning to highlight their own work and that of their partners to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities.



## LAW FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO

STELIP's proposal was approved by the Law Foundation of Ontario to move forward with their *Connecting Communities* project that aims to enhance legal support services for newcomers and second language speakers. The initiative, developed in collaboration with several other Local Immigration Partnerships throughout Southwest Ontario, will produce multilingual podcast 'minisodes' that each discuss and explain the basic concepts behind common legal problems and issues, and will also provide basic training to frontline staff on how to identify when a client is experiencing a legal problem. As the first part of the initiative, regional consultations have begun to identify which legal issues are most widely experienced and thus most suitable for the podcast.





## INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING

STELIP hosted the second installment of their intercultural competency training in December, building upon the “Fundamentals of Intercultural Competency” featured in the first session to add skills of “Effective Intercultural Communication”. As the practical necessity of this sort of training continues to grow in an increasingly multicultural Canada, these sessions are important professional development opportunities for staff in the social services and beyond. STELIP was once again pleased with the turnout for the event and plans to schedule the third training session for a 2019 date to be determined.



## IDERD

March 21st is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD). Building off of STELIP’s 2018 IDERD programming with regional secondary schools, STELIP engaged once again with local students to exchange ideas, information, and opinions on racial discrimination in St Thomas and Elgin County and discussed how the community can work together to combat and eradicate it. The 2019 IDERD programming included Mennonite students in the discussion and focused on repairing and building relationships between the two communities in East Elgin. This day has quickly become one of the favourite initiatives of the year for the STELIP staff and we can’t wait to do it again next year!

## FEBRUARY

### ARTS CRAWL

The Railway City Arts Crawl, an annual city-wide event celebrating some of the best artists and artisans the area has to offer, was held throughout the city of St. Thomas from February 22-23. STELIP built upon last year’s successful photo-voice and human-library event with a celebration of local culture. Dancers, musicians, cooks and actors shared their cultural skills and knowledge with the attendees of this wonderful yearly event, including a Latin dance demonstration that had everyone on the dance floor!



## MARCH

## ONGOING INITIATIVES AND COLLABORATIONS

### SOUTH WESTERN ONTARIO LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS

The LIPs of Southwestern Ontario meet quarterly to share updates, coordinate collective action on behalf of LIPs, discuss recent and upcoming government changes and initiatives, and develop workshop ideas for collaboration. STELIP recognizes the tremendous value of this informal organization and will continue to attend meetings in the future.

### ELGIN CHILDREN’S NETWORK

STELIP is a member of this local collaborative that works to build communities where every child has the opportunity to be engaged, empowered, and to thrive. The committee comprises sectors including public health, child care, family and children services, and social services. STELIP’s presence in this network ensures that the newcomer perspective is considered and built-into conversations about system planning and access, program development, and understanding community needs.

ST. THOMAS · ELGIN  
Local Immigration Partnership



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St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership



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#CultureLivesHere

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