



ST. THOMAS · ELGIN
Local Immigration Partnership

MOVING FORWARD

BUILDING WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



2020



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
Bilal Khalife	Community Member
Cindy Hastings	St. Thomas Economic Development
Dana Vanzanten	St. Thomas Public Library
Debra Mountenay	Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
Jackie Van Ryswyk	Employment Services Elgin
Jeff Kinsela	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
John Griffiths	Fanshawe College
Judith Wiley	Central Community Health Centre
Juliane Hundt	YWCA St. Thomas Elgin Settlement Services
Mark Maseo	Elgin Business Resource Centre
Mark Tinlin	City of St. Thomas
Mary Roes	Thames Valley District School Board
Paul Jenkins	St. Thomas and Area Chamber of Commerce
Sandra Poczobut	Elgin County Library
Shelley Harris	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
Stephanie Andrews	Service Canada Elgin County Economic Development

STELIP PROJECT TEAM

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

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AS ST. THOMAS-ELGIN LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP (STELIP) MATURES, SO DO OUR PROJECT AND INITIATIVES IN THE COMMUNITY. Each year community organizations incorporate immigrants needs as they develop and implement services. As a result, STELIP has more opportunities to collaborate and support these organizations as they move to make their services equitable. STELIP has seen growth in the Council membership including a new membership with the local Service Canada.

This year STELIP worked through strategic planning using the Theory of Change model, focusing on measurement and governance. Member agencies are embedding measurements for STELIP into their service delivery and will report that data throughout the implementation years to help measure the impact of work in the community.

STELIP is a progressive network that promotes and supports inclusion and continues to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities. It has organized the six priority areas led by the STELIP Council as follows:



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



FROM THERE TO HERE: OUR FAMILY TABLE VIDEOS

The first initiative under the *From There to Here* project. STELIP coordinating the documentaries created by Fanshawe's Advanced Film Program for the *From There to Here* project. The five short documentaries featured community members sharing their immigration and settlement stories along with a favourite family recipe. These videos were filmed in the participants' homes and provided a glimpse into the family life of people who immigrated to the region.



LOW GERMAN NETWORKING CONFERENCE

STELIP has been a participant at this networking conference since 2011 and has established connections that resulted in several community collaborations. Our work in the community helps build bridges for the Low-German speaking Mennonite community and various agencies. The information shared at this annual event helps to increase understanding of this cultural group and increases service providers understanding of the unique needs of immigrants and cultural minorities.

APRIL

MAY

COMMUNITY SURVEY – ACCESS TO SERVICES

STELIP partnered with Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) to reach out to immigrants in the community to measure their access to available services. A short 4-question survey was administered to better understand what services were being used and how additional supports were being accessed. The survey participants all had children enrolled in the ELL and ESL classes in TVDSB. This process was a pilot to ascertain if a larger survey could be conducted across the school board. Only schools with a large number of students enrolled in these classes were surveyed. Generally, the individuals in the survey were connected to a settlement agency. A different strategy would need to be used to connect with the local immigrants who do not access local services



This year, the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin was generously supported by the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre to deliver school-based settlement services in some local elementary and high-schools.

The pilot helped newcomer students and their families to settle into the local school system and to feel welcome and engaged within their new community. Our organization has received funding in its new contract to deliver the service moving forward.

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin was pleased to partner once again with STELIP on several community celebrations. Together, we organized a family-friendly Canada Day event and invited newcomers and established residents to celebrate the many different holidays observed during the winter season.



CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM DAY

In celebration of National Multiculturalism Day, decorated cookies were distributed across the county. Cookies were distributed to eight Municipal offices, nine library branches, and the two local settlement agencies. With this distribution strategy we reached community members that are not already engaged in our work and made residents more conscious of the diversity in this community. The celebration of multiculturalism continued with a community BBQ at Waterworks Park celebrated with the YWCA Settlement Services and their clients. Clients and their families came together for a shared meal and took the opportunity to build connections.

JUNE

WINDOW DISPLAY

STELIP was invited to promote diversity in a window display at iModular Homes in Aylmer to showcase the work of the two settlement agencies in the community, YWCA Settlement Services and MCS, . The display featured some of the photos from the Canada Through My Lens photovoice exhibit, archival photos from the Elgin County museum, examples of the Newcomer Information Guide, and specific information about available English language classes and local settlement agency office hours.



INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION DOCUMENT

Interpretation and Translation for immigrants is a support that is increasingly being requested in the community. Access to appropriate interpretation services is particularly important in medical, legal, and financial interactions to ensure immigrants are receiving equitable services. We will assist agencies and services to navigate the available resources and access a support that meets the needs of their agency. There is an Interpretation Guide available community-wide through STELIP.ca and has been included in the orientation for new medical staff through Health Force Ontario.





STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL MEMBER CONSULTATION

To help progress the development of the new strategic plan, Council members were each invited for in-person discussions. During these one-on-one meetings, a plan was developed to ensure the planned activities were achievable within the projected timelines with measurements that will help STELIP identify the impact of the work in the community. This part of the consultation was completed one-on-one to ensure the partners could hone in on their contributions and evaluate the participation from their agency.

JULY

HIRING AND RETAINING FOREIGN WORKERS

Some St. Thomas and Elgin County businesses have experienced challenges in recruiting and retaining workers and have opted to access temporary foreign workers to meet their production demands. St. Thomas and Elgin have traditionally had many agricultural workers that arrive to meet labour demands, but the need is now expanding to the manufacturing sectors. The process of bringing in these workers involves two federal ministries and requires a significant amount of paperwork and preparations. STELIP worked with local agencies to develop an information package to help these businesses navigate the process that is now available through the local economic development offices.



AUGUST

HIRING FOREIGN WORKERS – EAST ELGIN

To respond to a significant influx of inquiries about information about hiring foreign trained workers, an information session was organized in Aylmer. Elgin County Economic Development, STELIP, and the local Member of Parliament came together to share information about hiring foreign trained professionals and provided information from a variety of programs. While accessing these temporary programs helps when demand is elevated, many employers are looking for more permanent solutions that can address a need for employees long-term.





CULTURE DAYS

Culture Days is a national initiative and is celebrated around the community in a variety of ways by organizations and individuals. This year STELIP participated by hosting an event at the Horton Market in St. Thomas. Market goers had the opportunity to add to our community mural and make a #CultureLivesHere button. Over 100 people interacted with the booth over four hours. Many people shared stories of welcoming individuals to the community and were curious about the diversity in the city. The community mural is now on display at the STELIP team office.



WALK WITH ME

STELIP hosted the 8th annual Walk with Me event. This year 30 local agencies with close to 70 participants participated in the event. The targeted outcome for this event is the establishment of connections between agencies across the community and an increase in robust referrals. Along with networking opportunities, the event also includes a training opportunity to increase the skills of the participants and to share powerful tools with individuals that have direct contact with immigrants and other marginalized groups in the community. This year attendees participated in the *Before you Sign* workshop that was developed by the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin with funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario. Additionally, the local Community Health Status report and results from the Low German Needs Assessment surveys from Southwestern Public Health were presented to attendees.



SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER



ST. THOMAS PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK CLUB

STELIP partnered with the St. Thomas Public Library to host one of their monthly book club meetings. STELIP was able to coordinate a video conference with Sharon Bala, the author of *The Boat People*. This book shares the story of Sri Lankan refugees who claim asylum in Canada and is written from the points of view of a refugee claimant, his lawyer, and the adjudicator. The book stimulated great conversations and the participants asked insightful questions of the author.





HOME HARDWARE LADIES NIGHT

STELIP took part in the annual Home Hardware Ladies Night event. A booth was set up with the *Culture Lives Here* canvas mural and promotional materials were given out to over 300+ attendees. This was a great opportunity for STELIP to interact with community members of all demographics, spreading awareness for STELIP's priorities and upcoming events.

NOVEMBER

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY CONFERENCE

STELIP staff attended the annual Local Immigration Partnership Pre-conference and *Pathways to Prosperity Conference* themed "Immigration at the Crossroads, renewing support for immigration to Canada at the Intersections of Research, Policy and Practice". This event attracts representatives from the Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), academics, and various other government and agency staff for informative presentations, discussion, and networking. Key topics at the event included the changing attitudes and perceptions towards immigration and refugees, and the future of settlement, resettlement, and immigration to smaller, rural, and northern communities. This event helps solidify connections to other LIPs and establish networks with academia and government officials.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

STELIP hosted Community Conversations: A Glimpse into Our Local Diversity. Representatives from the Hindu, Islam and Mennonite faiths shared a brief overview of the origin of their religions and helped build understanding. Following the presentations attendees were invited to ask questions of the panel. The presentations and questions increased awareness for the cultures represented and built unity between community members. To start the evening, guests shared a "Unity Plate" meal, featuring flavours from the featured cultures of the evening. Approximately 60 guests attended, and the feedback was very positive from all.





STRATEGIC PLANNING

After two years of active engagement and planning, the Innoweave strategic planning project was completed. Starting in the new fiscal year, STELIP will implement the new Strategic Plan, set a measurement collection schedule, and have the signed membership agreements based on a Theory of Change Model. This new plan results in a change in reporting while the outputs of STELIP will remain the same. The new strategy areas of STELIP are: Community Readiness, Workforce Development and Employer Supports, Equitable Supports, Education, Civic and Social Inclusion.



LOW GERMAN SPEAKING MENNONITE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

To meet growing needs of the Low German speaking Mennonites in the area, a new Community of Practice Group was formed to help share promising practices and resources to better support this diverse group. The low German Speaking Mennonites include citizens, individuals that have reclaimed their Canadian citizenship, and family class permanent residents. Many of the citizens have never lived in Canada and have the same barriers as other immigrants. This community of practice will help coordinate efforts to provide equitable supports to their diverse needs.

DECEMBER

BEFORE YOU SIGN

A successful grant application to the Law Foundation of Ontario provided funding for the Before you Sign project to be developed and implemented in Southwestern Ontario. This project consisted of three phases: Community consultation across Southwestern Ontario, content development, and facilitated workshops. The Community consultations were supported by the Local Immigration Partnerships in Chatham, Huron, Sarnia, and Windsor with an additional consultation in Brantford. During the content development phase, a workshop and manual were created to train frontline workers in providing legal information to immigrants. In addition to the training package, podcasts were created for seven different topics (Separations and Divorce, Custody and Access, Fraud, Rights of Employees Upon Termination, Eviction, Employment Insurance, and OW and ODSP). These were then translated into 9 additional languages (Arabic, French, Karen, Khmer, Low German, Mandarin, Nepali, Spanish, and Urdu). The facilitated workshop phase included six workshops across southwestern Ontario and were attended by 160 individuals. The training and podcasts are now available as 3-module webinars online through CLEO and on STELIP.ca.



JANUARY

Before you Sign

“Before You Sign”, a project that is aimed at helping and educating newcomers to better understand the legal systems and supports in Canada, by providing easy access to basic legal knowledge. I had the chance to contribute into this project by interpreting English legal material to Arabic and French language. It was my first time to record podcasts, an exciting experience! Looking forward to more excitement and greater achievements with STELIP! - Bilal





YWCA WOMEN'S DAY

The 2020 YWCA Women's Day event featured the From There to Here theme with one of the cookbook participants featured as the guest speaker for the event. She shared her family immigration story and the positive impacts food had on celebrating and maintaining her traditions. This event is open to the community and attracts 150 participants, guest speakers, and workshop facilitators. This is the first of a series of community events STELIP hopes to leverage and share the message of the book.

FEBRUARY

FROM THERE TO HERE: OUR FAMILY TABLE

The second phase of the *From There to Here* project is a local cookbook that was published and made available for purchase within the community. The cookbook is a collection of immigration and integration stories of 12 local immigrants to St. Thomas-Elgin paired with recipes from their cultural backgrounds. The participants in the project come from various countries and cultures that span the globe and help demonstrate the diversity that is prevalent in our community. The final product is a 104-page hardcover book with stunning full colour pictures. The book is available for purchase at select retailers across St. Thomas and Elgin County.



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.

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