



ST. THOMAS-ELGIN  
LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

# Moving Forward

BUILDING WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

**2021**



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The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) reached our 10-year milestone in March 2020. We have so many reasons to celebrate as we reflect on the growth of the community, rise in diversity, and additional opportunities to build a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community.

This milestone celebration has been eclipsed by the global shift brought on by COVID-19. Our outreach efforts and partnerships were impacted by the restrictions of COVID as many of the community initiatives were placed on hold as STELIP took on an active role in disseminating information to help keep the community informed of the ever-evolving system changes, updated information, and available supports. As the community was working to adapt to the changes brought on by COVID-19, the Black Lives Matters social movement erupted across the USA and into Canada. It brought into focus systemic disparities and their effects on Black communities. These two global events had a profound impact on the work of STELIP in 2020-21. As the community shifted and adapted, so did the work and influence of STELIP programming.

There has been changeover in partnership representation at the STELIP Advisory Council and the new perspectives naturally changes the scope of our work. Additionally, the Council membership expanded with the St. Thomas Police Services formally joining the work of the group.

STELIP was poised to begin the new strategic plan implementation that would increase community measurements. The goal defined by our Theory of Change is that by 2025, 80% of newcomers to St. Thomas Elgin will progress from settlement to integration within 5 years of arriving in St. Thomas or Elgin County.

With the implementation of the new Strategic Plan, the priority areas were also updated. The new areas of focus have been redefined as:

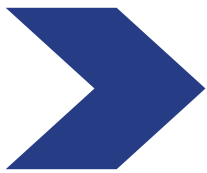
- Workforce Development and Employer Supports
- Community Readiness
- Equitable Supports
- Education
- Civic and Social Inclusion

Partnerships and initiatives designed with Council members were re-evaluated and a refreshed focus now directs the work of STELIP.

## From There to Here: Our Family Table

The From There to Here cookbook is a collection of wonderful immigration and integration stories of 12 local immigrants combined with their favourite recipes that remind them of their culture. The participants in the project come from various countries and cultures that span the globe and demonstrate the diversity that enriches our community. The final product is a beautiful 104-page hardcover book with stunning full-page colour pictures.

The cookbook was scheduled to be launched in April at an official event overflowing with cultural food and activities. Unfortunately, the event was postponed and eventually cancelled due to the pandemic. The cookbook was launched throughout the community through local businesses, online promotion, and small-scale pop-up events. There is the opportunity to host a cultural celebration with the From There to Here: Our Family Table cookbook as a central component once in-person events are again permitted.

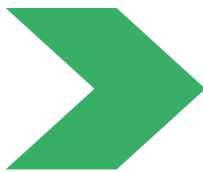
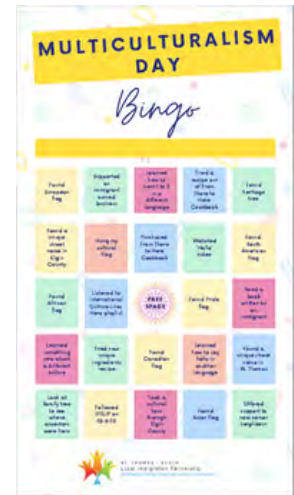


## STELIP Website - COVID-19 Resources

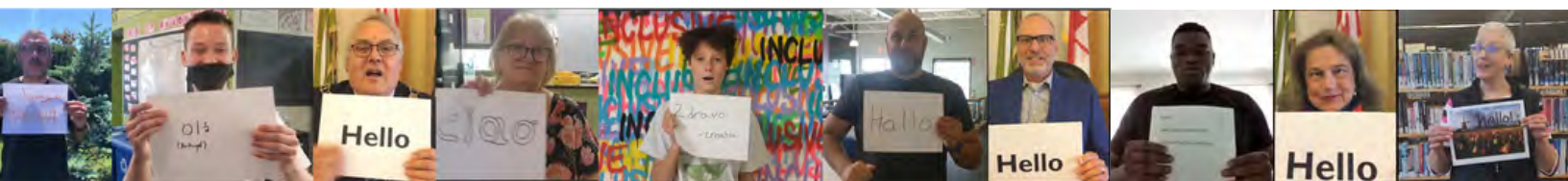
As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, there was a growing need for accurate information specifically for newcomers and immigrants. STELIP created a page on our website dedicated to collecting and sharing information from the various government and community sources. This webpage also has links to information and supports that have been translated into multiple languages. The sudden shift to online service provision intensified the need to make these resources readily available. The information continues to be updated and currently information about vaccinations has been added.

## National Multiculturalism Day

Typically, STELIP likes to host an event for National Multiculturalism Day to celebrate the diversity in the community. This year the celebrations went online, and community members were invited to celebrate with STELIP in a few unique ways. A BINGO card was created to encourage our community to acknowledge the rich multiculturalism in their everyday life by looking for national flags, street names, and heritage trees. STELIP also invited our community to celebrate at home with inspiration from an international BBQ menu as well as a Culture Lives Here Spotify playlist of songs from around the world. Additionally, a collection of video clips was compiled to create a “Welcome Greeting” video. STELIP Council, St. Thomas City Council, and local community members submitted a clip of them extending a simple Hello greeting in multiple languages. Learning how to greet individuals in their own language helps build trust and respect.



Another aspect of the Multiculturalism Day celebrations was the feature of local immigrant business owners in St. Thomas and Elgin. STELIP partnered with the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) to showcase these important members of our community. For one week in June, insightful social media posts were shared on Instagram and Facebook capturing the immigration story of business owners that enrich our community. This feature brought awareness of the diversity of the business community.



# OCTOBER

## **Walk With Me**

Since 2012 STELIP has hosted a networking conference for front line service providers to build connections and develop skills to better serve immigrant and newcomer clients. This virtual event was still able to maintain key elements of building connections using small group discussions and interactions. The main presentations were from Dharshi Lacey from Pillar Non-Profit who spoke of Unconscious Bias, as well as Summer Burton from Literacy Link South Central who shared tips for Blended Service Delivery Models. The morning also included a cultural self-reflection and a professional introduce yourself in 30-seconds activity. In total, 50 representatives from 20 local agencies attended the session, a great representation for these unprecedented times.



# NOVEMBER

## **Pathways to Prosperity Conference**

STELIP staff attended the annual Local Immigration Partnership conference themed “The Evolution of Local Immigration Partnerships and Réseaux en immigration francophone in Effecting Change” and Pathways to Prosperity Conference themed “The Future of Immigration and (Re)Settlement in Canada.” This event transitioned online and as a result there were high caliber presentations but with fewer opportunities for networking. Over the 3-day conference period, the focus was on the shift in the sector due to COVID-19 and how racism was being addressed in Canada. Plenary sessions were provided by the Minister and Deputy Ministers of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, The Royal Society of Canada, and by Dr. Christopher Stuart Taylor. This event helps solidify connections to other LIPs across the country and establishes networks with academia and government officials.

# DECEMBER

To help spread cheer during the challenging holiday season, STELIP aired a radio ad on the two local stations that included holiday greetings supplied by newcomers in nine languages. This campaign helps local immigrants see themselves reflected in the community and helps residents understand that the region is growing more diverse. STELIP is continually looking for subtle ways to integrate newcomers into the fabric of the community.

Holiday craft packages were created in lieu of the annual Holiday Potluck that STELIP holds in collaboration with the YWCA Settlement Services. To help welcome and connect with the newcomer families in our community, a fun DIY holiday kit was created that included ingredients and supplies to create ornaments and other festive activities.

# JANUARY

Anecdotally, racism and discrimination in our community has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Specifically, the community of Aylmer became a hub of a vocal anti-mask and anti-lock-down group. Though the defiant group only represents a very small portion of the community, the result was a notable increase in cases of discrimination against Low-German-Speaking Mennonites that wear traditional forms of dress. To be better prepared, STELIP staff participated in a bystander training to help provide tools and skills to intervene in a situation where any form of discrimination is occurring.

# FEBRUARY

Food is a common and welcoming way for people to experience other cultures. To highlight the prominence of diversity in the community STELIP created a month-long event called Global Flavours: A Taste Experience of St. Thomas & Elgin. Partnering with the Small Business Enterprise Centre and Railway City Tourism, the community was encouraged to learn more about our local business owners and taste some of the different ethnic foods available in the area. Fourteen restaurants in St. Thomas, Central Elgin, and Aylmer participated in the event. A passport was created, and residents received a stamp when they supported a local restaurant. Restaurants were excited to participate, and it gave the community an opportunity to acknowledge the different cuisines and cultures that enrich our community. We anticipate this will remain an annual event and look forward to expanding the number of locations.







To commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD), STELIP partnered with local high school student, Chloe Ngakoso, to launch the inaugural Diversify your Art campaign. Chloe experienced racism and discrimination in the school system, and since speaking out, she championed a Black Student Support network at the school board. She also started a t-shirt company called Afro Queens to help other BIPOC residents show their pride for their culture. The Diversify your Art campaign encouraged the creation of an art piece that explores the effects of discrimination. A quote from Amanda Gorman's poem the Hill we Climb was used for inspiration: "And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us". Online workshops were offered to show how to use mixed media and video editing to express their experiences. The newcomer youth club from the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services also participated in the mixed media session. STELIP hopes to partner with the local school boards to grow the initiative in the coming years.

STELIP, the St. Thomas Public Library, and Railway City Tourism partnered for St. Thomas Speaks. A series of videos showcase perspectives of immigrants and other community members that moved to the area. Participants share the things they love about the community and ideas for on how to progress over the next 5 years. This project helps give immigrants a voice in the community, shares the story of how people found their way to St. Thomas, and helps people see how newcomers strengths can have positive impacts on growing the community's resiliency. The inaugural video was launched for IDERD with nine additional videos to be shared over the remainder of 2021.



# ONGOING INITIATIVES AND COLLABORATIONS

## **South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships**

The LIPs of Southwestern Ontario have increased meetings regularly from quarterly to monthly since the onset of the pandemic. The LIPs meet virtually to share updates, coordinate collective action on behalf of LIPs, discuss recent and upcoming changes from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and develop workshops and initiative ideas for collaboration. The SWOLIP members have identified three areas for working groups to facilitate regional virtual training: Employment and Labour Force, Community Attraction and Retention, and Embedding Anti Black Racism into LIP governance.

The increased meeting opportunities has strengthened the work of SWOLIP and allowed for more regional partnerships and initiatives. STELIP recognizes the value of this informal gathering and will continue to attend meetings in the future.

## **Survey to Measure Experience of Discrimination**

In addition to the regional workshops, the SWOLIP group also collaborated with Western University to design a regional survey to measure the experiences of discrimination. The survey was administered by FORUM Research Inc. that initially recruited participants through a phone call and then guided them to the online surveys. The survey targeted three groups: visible minorities and immigrants, first nations and indigenous, and the general population. The data collection was completed this year and the results will be analyzed by Masters' students at the Western University. After the initial quantitative data collection is completed, a qualitative data collection will occur to ensure key population groups are included in the survey. This data will help better understand the experiences in the community and will be used to develop STELIP Council's activities and initiatives.

## **National LIP Secretariat**

The National LIP Secretariat is now operating in a limited capacity but has taken the lead on several national initiatives. As the number of LIPs increases, formal systems will help collaborate and disseminate information and training.

Anti Racism Series - The National LIP Secretariat organized training opportunities for LIPs from December to February including the following topics: Reflections on Power, Developing Anti-Black Racism Skills, Competencies for Social Change, Indigenous Sharing Circle, and Media Relations and Communication Training. These topics were selected to help LIP staff develop skills and understanding as IRCC expands funding to allow LIPs to include more general initiatives that address inclusion and anti-discrimination.

To help foster communication and provides opportunities for shared learning the National LIP Secretariat organized a virtual 4-week LIP training and learning opportunity series. These sessions gave LIPs from across the country the opportunity to connect and discuss topics like LIP collaboration, anti-racism work, starting a LIP podcast, partnership councils, and challenges and benefits for LIPs housed in service provider organizations. STELIP took a lead in supporting the facilitation of these events and continues to look for more opportunities to connect LIPs and strengthen the work across all communities.

## **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
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
John Griffiths	Fanshawe College
Juliane Hundt	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services
Mark Maseo	Elgin Business Resource Centre
Mark Tinlin	City of St. Thomas
Michael Tamasi	Thames Valley District School Board
Nafisa Gillani	Central Community Health Centre
Paul Jenkins	St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
Shelley Harris	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin.
Tanya Calvert	St. Thomas Police Service
Tara McCaulley	St. Thomas Economic Development Corporation
	Elgin County Economic Development
	Elgin County Library

### **STELIP PROJECT TEAM**

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

ST. THOMAS · ELGIN  
Local Immigration Partnership



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St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership



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