


ST. THOMAS • ELGIN
Local Immigration Partnership

Moving Forward Report

2024

Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive 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

We are a collaborative community initiative that aims to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities by supporting the integration of immigrants and promoting the value of diversity.

Our Principles

Inclusivity – Our work 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. We will work towards equal participation while promoting social justice.

Collaboration – Our work will emphasize developing a strong and respectful relationship with immigrant communities to ensure a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment.

Empowerment – Our work will strive to support new immigrants' capacity to provide for themselves and their families through their own means and their own decisions.

Sustainability – Our work will be planned and evaluated to ensure continued effectiveness and long-term feasibility.

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Highlights of 2023-2024

Our work as the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) is everchanging and constantly adapting to the needs of our community. The 2023-2024 fiscal year was no exception.

With local growth on the horizon, we have particularly focused on strengthening workforce partnerships and expanding workforce initiatives this year. Historically, our community has had lower immigration rates, but this is changing. With this growth comes an increasing need for immigrants to be supported in their employment journeys, from searching for work, to starting a job, to maintaining employment. Simultaneously, we need to work with employers to support welcoming workplaces that retain immigrant employees and help them integrate into their new community.

Increasingly, national and provincial ministries have deemed immigrants a priority population. Locally, this means more service providers are collecting immigrant and race-based data. With the intention of better immigrants, they are using this data to inform their programming and promote their services to immigrants. As a collaborative initiative, we facilitate the sharing of promising practices between local agencies and organizations to support this work. Additionally, our annual flagship event, *Walk With Me*, a service provider networking event, continued to connect local service providers and increase referrals between agencies to better serve immigrant clients.

This year we developed [a number of resources](#) in response to community needs, particularly our *Planning Events that are Culturally Inclusive* guidebook and *Working with Low German Speaking Mennonites: A Guide for Service Providers* (in collaboration with the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community of Practice of Elgin, St. Thomas, Oxford, and Norfolk). We continued to be responsive to local needs as they arose, in addition to following the direction of our 2020-2025 strategic plan.

Finally, we have seen a steady increase in public awareness of our partnership and our work, in part due to an increased presence on social media, and in print, radio, and television. Several of our events were covered in local media this year, including our immigrant survey and Welcoming Week activities.

With 2023-2024 being the fourth year of our current [five-year strategic plan](#), together with our STELIP Council, we have worked toward the goal laid out in the plan's impact statement:

By 2025, 80% of newcomers to St. Thomas-Elgin will progress from settlement to integration within five years of arriving in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Our strategic plan is realized through yearly action plans centred around five priority areas:

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

The following is an overview of our work during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Additionally, we have continued to support the collection of measurements and statistics through our community partners to capture their initiatives and how immigrants access services. This information is used to inform our annual action planning as well as our community partner's planning and service delivery. Some collected measures are also highlighted throughout.





Workforce Development and Employer Supports

An economically successful region requires both a workforce whose skills align with local jobs and workplaces that help their employees thrive. Locally, the opening of large-scale industrial facilities and the subsequent increase of local services will lead to expansive population growth and increased diversity, including a large proportion of immigrants. To help prepare for this change, we have planned more activities and initiatives within this priority.

This year, the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce [updated their member directory](#) to reflect languages spoken at each business and organization. This addition was the result of community need discussed during our council meetings. The directory is updated annually.

Employment Services Elgin updated their [job retention checklist](#), which assists immigrants in integrating into their first workplace in Canada. The resource will be shared with immigrants who successfully find jobs with their employment counsellors.

In partnership with other Southwestern Ontario LIPs (SWOLIP) and WILL Immploy, we hosted a webinar for employers, “[Creative Approaches for Hiring and Retaining Immigrant Employees](#)” in September. The webinar featured employers who shared the innovative strategies they used to tap into the unique skills and potential of immigrant employees. This webinar coincided with Welcoming Week and was also promoted as a Welcoming Week event.

In partnership with WILL Immploy and the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce, we held a [Recruitment and Retention workshop](#) for employers in August. Representatives from 23 local employers heard from expert consultants on the topics of recruiting and retaining immigrant employees. This event also connected employers to WILL Immploy’s retention project. Four employers that attended the event continued to participate in this WILL Immploy project.

In Aylmer, together with WILL Immploy, Mennonite Community Services (MCS) Employment Services, and Elgin County Economic Development, we held a [mentorship event](#) in October to connect potential immigrant mentees to mentors in the region through WILL Immploy’s mentorship program.

We published [an article in a local magazine](#), *This Month in Elgin*, **outlining the importance of religious accommodations in the workplace**, with expert input from Human Resources Partners 4 Business. This article came out of a community need expressed during our council meetings. Ongoing, we will prioritize publishing more employment-focused articles about relevant topics.

To increase connections with local businesses, STELIP staff regularly attended the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce's **Business After 5** networking events. These events are hosted by different local businesses and are a great opportunity to increase the presence of STELIP in the community.

We continue to sit on various workforce-focused committees, including the **Elgin Middlesex Oxford (EMO) Workforce Planning and Development Board's Workforce Advisory Committee**, the **London Economic Region Workforce Advisory Committee**, and the **Elgin St. Thomas Workforce Development Network**, the **PowerCo HR Taskforce** as well as on the **Western Ontario Warden's Caucus Economic Development committee** as a representative of SWOLIP. This provides us the opportunity to encourage agencies to consider immigrants needs at the strategic planning level.





Community Readiness


A welcoming community is a place that accepts and celebrates all its members—where people feel as though they belong and want to integrate. The community needs to feel like a safe place for immigrants and newcomers to integrate. For this to be realized, it's important for local residents to understand the value of diversity and then intentionally work to welcome and support immigrant integration. A starting point is to increase opportunities to interact with diverse community members and learn from their experiences.

We undertook **delegations to all eight municipalities** in our region: Bayham, Malahide, Aylmer, Central Elgin, St. Thomas, Southwold, Dutton-Dunwich, and West Elgin. During each municipal council presentation, we gave an overview of our work, highlighted some of our resources, and emphasized the importance of intentionally building a community that is welcoming to immigrants. We also shared the [Pathways to Prosperity Welcoming Communities Toolkits](#), encouraging the municipalities to use them to evaluate their communities and ultimately promote their region as a destination for newcomers.

We are a member of the **Community Conversations** planning committee alongside the St. Thomas Library, Elgin County Library, and the Elgin-St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty. Community Conversations is a series of free community-building events that provide opportunities for underrepresented and marginalized groups to share information and for the wider community to build connections with each other through conversation. This year, two different Community Conversations events were held, exploring environmental sustainability in April, and examining experiences of poverty and homelessness in October. Altogether, 140 participants attended these two events.

We facilitated a **workshop** for the Elgin County library, museum, and archives staff meeting about **planning culturally inclusive events**. This workshop aligned with our [Planning Events that are Culturally Inclusive guidebook](#), and guided the 45 participants in how to incorporate principles of cultural inclusivity into events and programming (e.g. library and museum programming).

Together with our council and other community partners, we held a successful **Welcoming Week** in September. We kicked off the week with a **community barbecue** with support from the Kinsmen Club of St. Thomas and EarlyOn St. Thomas-Elgin, which saw 125 participants. We held a **Canadian-themed trivia night**, with questions based on the Canadian Citizenship requirements, in partnership with YWCA St.



Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services. We had 5 teams take part, with a total of 25 participants. The St. Thomas Public Libraries ran **multilingual storytimes** throughout the month of September, kicking off during Welcoming Week. These storytimes featured community members sharing a story in their language, celebrating the diversity of languages spoken in St. Thomas-Elgin and introducing young children to new languages. Across the three events, which featured stories in Spanish and Ukrainian, there were 111 participants. Welcoming Week also coincided with **Mennonite Heritage Week**, so we were able to cross-promote some Mennonite Heritage Week as Welcoming Week events: Mennonite Community Services held both a **soup cook-off** (featuring Mennonite sommaborsch soup) and a **traditional Mennonite sing-along**. Finally, we also collaborated on an **employment webinar with SWOLIP** about retaining immigrant employees as a Welcoming Week event. More information about this webinar can be found in the Workforce Development and Employer Supports section. Welcoming Week was covered in local news publications, including [MyFM](#).

In February, we ran the fourth annual **Global Flavours: An International Taste Experience of St. Thomas & Elgin** in partnership with Elgin County Tourism and Railway City Tourism (St. Thomas). This annual event celebrates the diversity of food, cultures, and people throughout the region by inviting the community to visit participating cultural restaurants in the month of February. An estimated 150 people took part in the event. We had 23 participating restaurants, representing cuisines from Mexico, the Caribbean, Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia and more. Global Flavours was covered in local news publications, including the St. Thomas Times-Journal and [Hometown St. Thomas](#) magazine. We also had a chance to highlight Global Flavours on a local television show [Next Week Today](#).

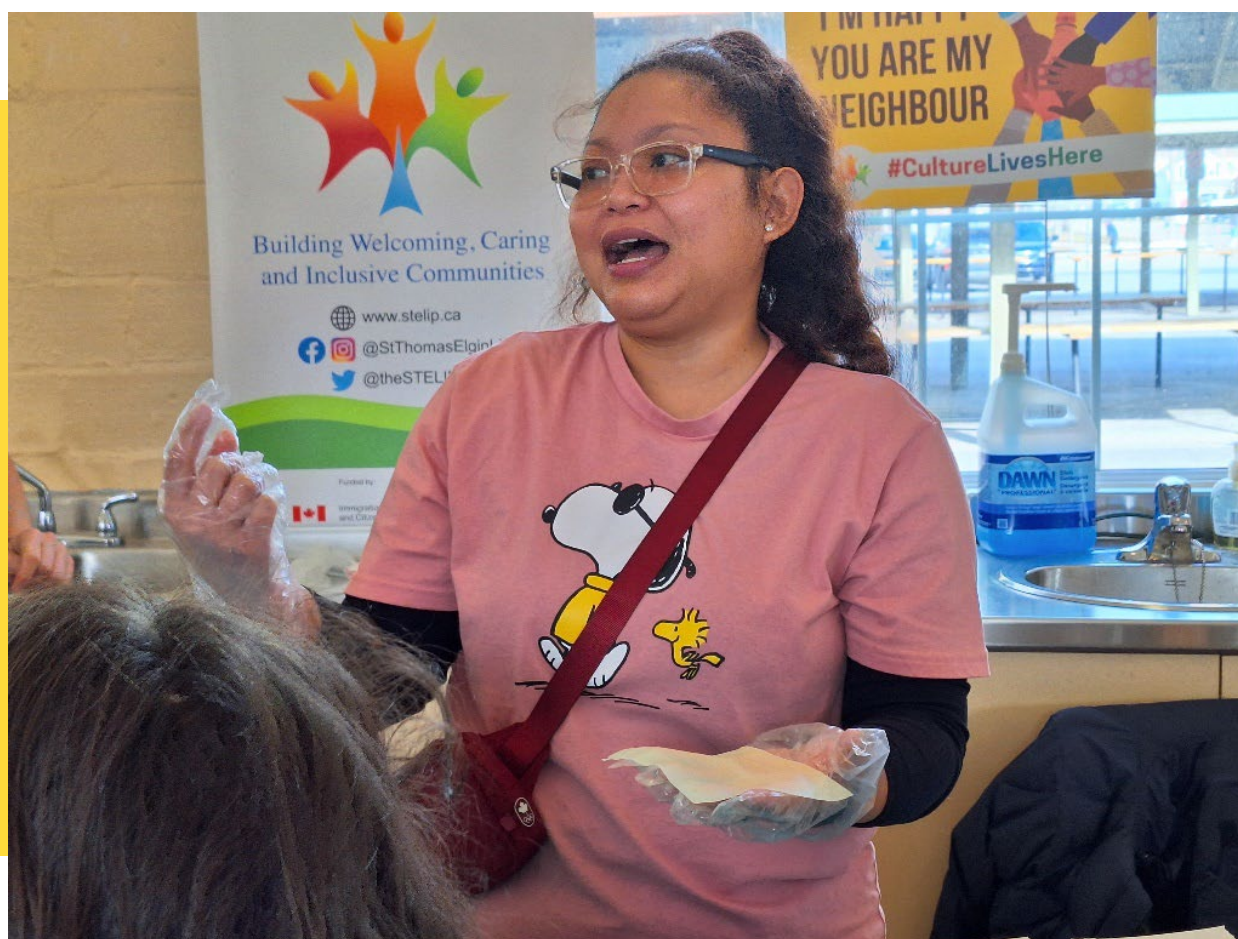
Engaging children and youth is key to achieve sustainable and long-term community readiness and to build awareness of the benefits of diversity. STELIP continues to foster opportunities for initiatives that centre and support youth in the community. This year, we supported EarlyON, the Elgin County Library, and students at a local high school in various youth programming.

We took part in the St. Thomas-Elgin EarlyON **Children's Festivals** in St. Thomas, Aylmer, and West Lorne. These events are primarily geared to preschool-aged children and their caregivers. We were able to promote our 2023 Immigrant Survey as well as make connections with close to 500 community members across the region. Children in attendance could win a prize by spinning a wheel and could participate in a henna colouring craft.

Students at St. Joseph's Catholic High School started a **Multicultural Club**, and the club vice-president connected with STELIP for support. Along with general guidance and direction, we were able to support the club with their celebration of Black History Month in February by facilitating making buttons and keychains. Their club has a membership of about 35 students and one staff advisor. The club meets regularly

during their lunch break and coordinates display boards and activities for the larger student body like bake sales, trivia games, and poetry contests.

In partnership with the Elgin County Library, we facilitated an **Around the World March Break** program for school-aged children. Incorporating crafts, games, food, and dance from around the world, participants developed an appreciation for different cultures while having fun. A total of 37 children participated across two locations.





Equitable Supports


Equitable systems allow for everyone to meet their needs, with an increased potential for positive outcomes. For services to become more equitable, specialized supports should be provided, or developed, for groups or individuals that experience barriers or less favourable results. To ensure immigrants thrive, services can offer supports or accommodations, like interpretation, culturally sensitive services, or additional information.

We updated our **Newcomer Information Package**, which was first published in 2013. This resource explains important concepts about Canadian life and outlines key resources and agencies in the community, covering topics like settlement services, housing, employment, education, healthcare, and safety. Along with general updates, information about dental care and childcare was added to the content based on recommendations from our council. Updated copies were distributed to our local settlement agencies, libraries, municipal offices, MP and MPP offices, and other community agencies. It is also [available online on our website](#).

We also updated our **Interpretation Services Guide**. In addition to listing the local providers and options for interpretation and translation, this resource outlines considerations for interpretation. It covers the importance of interpretation, the difference between interpretation and translation, the difference between trained and informal interpretation, and more. This resource is available on [our website](#).

We continue to sit as a member of the **Low German Speaking Mennonite Community of Practice of Elgin, St. Thomas, Oxford, and Norfolk (LGSM COP) steering committee** alongside other community partners. The LGSM COP has members representing 40 agencies across diverse sectors like healthcare, education, and social services. The LGSM COP met three times to share updates and promising practices, discuss challenges, develop resources, and learn from guest speakers about meeting the needs of the Low German Speaking Mennonite community. We also helped develop and design a **resource about effectively serving Low German Speaking Mennonite clients** in response to the need expressed by the COP members. This resource provides cultural and historical context as well as recommendations for service providers.

We are a member of the Elgin County Drowning Coalition and created a **Drowning Prevention video** in Plautdietsch (Low German), which is available on our [YouTube channel](#). The translation was done by Mennonite Community Services, funded by the LGSM COP. Newcomers to Canada were identified as a key priority population in



drowning prevention education, and many newcomers in St. Thomas-Elgin are Low German Speaking Mennonites.

Once again, this year we held **Walk With Me, our annual service provider networking event**. This event brings together frontline service providers to connect with and learn from each other. Half the event is devoted to open networking time, and the other half to professional development, featuring presentations about relevant topics. This year, we highlighted some resources and tools in our community specifically geared towards newcomers and immigrants. Representatives of our local settlement agencies presented details about their services, and then we led a workshop about STELIP's free resources. This year, 70 service providers representing 30 agencies and services attended.

The ultimate goal of *Walk With Me* is to increase referrals between agencies that serve immigrants by increasing frontline service providers' knowledge of community programs, resources, and services. Participant feedback immediately after the event indicated that 42% of attendees had increased their awareness of community services. Confidence in making referrals increased to 31%. A follow-up survey sent four months later found that 53% of respondents had made referrals to an agency they connected with at *Walk With Me*.

The St. Thomas Police Service (STPS) created a **Community Inclusion Council** that meets regularly to provide input and recommendations to STPS. We were also able to **meet with the STPS Chief** to discuss the results of our immigrant survey and the needs of our immigrant community members.

To raise awareness of the demographics of the immigrant community and their needs, we **presented to several local agencies and groups**, reaching approximately 120 individuals. Each presentation shared relevant 2021 Census statistics and included some specific information outlined below:

- Elgin-Ontario Health Team (OHT): Included anecdotal observations from local settlement agencies and results from the Immigrant Survey, including access to interpretation and experiences of discrimination when accessing healthcare. We also shared information about a national campaign to increase access to interpretation in a healthcare setting and spoke about the importance of using client data collected for positive change.
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Thames Valley: Included service use results from the Immigrant Survey, as well as experiences of belonging and isolation.
- Fanshawe College Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes: Included an exploration of identity and power, the importance of understanding local demographics, and shared available resources.

- St. Thomas Public Library: Focused on supporting patrons with varying levels of English using strategies like plain language, conveying information visually, and accessing available translation and interpretation resources, as well as a tutorial on using Google Translate. We also explored naming conventions from different countries and cultures and the challenges of adapting them to Canadian naming conventions.
- We also shared similar information on [Next Week Today](#), a local Rogers **TV program**, where we highlighted our work and available resources.





Education

Education builds the skills needed to communicate, find employment, and make social connections. Access to education is essential for newcomers and immigrants in our community, whether its English language classes, adult literacy supports, or formal postsecondary training. Increasing the availability of these services is an important part of supporting immigrant integration.

We continued to support local partners who provide education for newcomers and immigrants in our community. The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin continued to offer **English language classes**. With the addition of an evening class in St. Thomas, 60 learners were enrolled across three classes. They also offered supplementary English Language Conversation Circles to help learners build skills and confidence in a more informal environment.

Mennonite Community Services, in partnership with YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin, who provided the English Language classes, and Fanshawe College, who provided additional supports, continued to offer the **Family Education and Support Program Aylmer (FESPA)**. This program helps build skills and offers social opportunities for newcomer women and preschoolers. This year, approximately 70 women were supported by FESPA. This program continues to increase access to services for Low German Speaking Mennonite women in the region, a group that tends to have low levels of literacy and face additional barriers to accessing services.

Another community program that serves the educational needs of Low German Speaking Mennonites in Elgin County is the **Bridge program** at Thames Valley District School Board. Now in its second year at schools in east Elgin County, this program offers alternative classrooms that meet the cultural needs of Low German Speaking Mennonite students and their families. Siblings learn together and are exposed to cultural learning as well as regular school curriculum. Students and their families are also supported educationally if they visit relatives outside of Canada or help their families with agricultural tasks.

This year, approximately 150 international students were enrolled at the St. Thomas/Elgin campus of Fanshawe College. We facilitated **connecting international students with community supports**, including with the St. Thomas Islamic Centre for Ramadan meals and community connection. We also attended the **Ask Us event** each semester, providing an opportunity to share information with students about community supports and particularly connect them with settlement services. This event also gave students an opportunity to ask us questions about our work and resources.



Civic and Social Inclusion

An inclusive community is a place that reflects the needs and perspectives of all its members. When immigrants and newcomers build an understanding of life locally, and in Canada, opportunities for social interactions become more available. Building friendships, volunteering, and receiving recognition contributes to immigrants' sense of belonging and integration.

In partnership with YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services, we facilitated events that connected newcomers and immigrants to each other and to their community. Together, we ran a **Newcomer Barbeque** in July that had close to 200 participants, a wonderful response for our small community. In addition to newcomers, members of local municipal governments, police services, and our council members attended to welcome newcomers to our community. EarlyON St. Thomas-Elgin provided children's activities during the event. We had also planned a newcomer social gathering and potluck for January, which saw 101 people register, but unfortunately had to cancel due to inclement weather.

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services also continued to run **Newcomer Networking Circles**, which give newcomers an opportunity to learn about important settlement topics and about life in St. Thomas-Elgin as well as meet new people and connect to services in the community. They ran 15 sessions which saw a total of 211 participants.

Together with our council and other community partners, we held a successful **Welcoming Week** in September. These events centred immigrants and contributed to enhancing newcomer civic and social inclusion as much as they supported our other priority areas of community readiness, equitable supports, and workforce development. Particularly the community barbeque, multilingual storytime, and Mennonite Heritage Week events (soup cook-off and sing-along) promoted the social inclusion of newcomers and immigrants in our community.

Several immigrant community members were celebrated at **local awards ceremonies** this past year. At SBEC's Small Business Awards, Amarchi Kejeh was awarded the Under 40 Leadership Award and The Fritter Shop, a second-generation family-run shop established by Dutch immigrants, was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award.



Research

Building an understanding of the local context is necessary to plan and make decisions that are responsive to the local reality. To build an awareness of the experiences of immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin we facilitated and supported a variety of local research projects this year.

Our **qualitative experiences of discrimination study**, which built on the findings from the quantitative study conducted in 2021, explored instances of discrimination experienced by racialized individuals and immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin. This project was in partnership with Western University's Network for Economic and Social Trends (NEST). Due to low participation, St. Thomas-Elgin and Oxford responses were combined for the final report. A total of 15 interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023 with immigrants and/or racialized people who experienced discrimination. The [final report](#) was released in March 2024.

We undertook our **first immigrant survey** in June. We had just under 100 respondents (68 completing the full-length survey and 31 completing the shorter survey), representing most major categories of immigration, including permanent and temporary residents and Canadian citizens. The results of this survey gave insight into the experiences, challenges, and recommendations of some immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin, which can be used to inform community collective action, planning, and program and policy development. The survey received ethics approval from Community Ethics Research Office (CREO). While the recruitment methods (not randomized) and survey sample size mean the results are not a statistically significant representation of all immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin, the results still provide important insight into the perspectives and experiences of those immigrants who participated in the survey. We released the [full survey report](#) in January 2024 to strong community interest. Our survey results were covered by local news sources, including [MyFM](#) and [Next Week Today](#).

This survey was the result of a collaboration with the Waterloo Region Local Immigration Partnership (WRLIP). WRLIP convened LIPs from across Canada to implement local Immigrant Surveys. The collective LIPs from across Canada to implement local Immigrant Surveys. The collective worked together to amend and update WRLIPs immigrant survey from 2021, share translated documents and promotional material, and support the disaggregation of the data. The collaborative work was documented and shared for other LIPs to use as a toolkit to support them in implementing similar surveys in their community.

We also developed **two companion surveys modelled after the immigrant survey**, one specifically for immigrant and racialized healthcare workers, and another for international students to understand the experiences of these two groups. The healthcare worker survey was distributed in March 2024 through local healthcare networks, including through the Elgin OHT (Ontario Health Team), community health centres (CCHC and WECHC), and local healthcare recruiter. The international student survey also began distribution in March 2024 through Fanshawe College St. Thomas/Elgin Regional Campus. The results will be analyzed and released in the coming year and will help inform strategies to improve the experiences of these two groups.

We assisted with [Western University's \(NEST\) Equity in Settlement research](#) project, helping to promote the survey and connect them with potential participants. The project is ongoing. This research will look at newcomers' experiences accessing settlement services to understand any instances of inequity or discrimination that may have occurred.





Ongoing Local, Regional, and National Initiatives and Collaborations

While the work of STELIP is specific to St. Thomas and Elgin and primarily centred on local needs, there are opportunities to collaborate beyond the bounds of the community to leverage expertise and share resources.

Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships (SWOLIP)

The Southwestern Ontario LIPs (SWOLIP) met four times this year, three times virtually and once in person. We meet regularly to share promising practices and explore opportunities for collaboration.

This year many SWOLIP members **facilitated a qualitative experiences of discrimination study**. Five LIPs collaborated with Western University and two others collaborated with University of Guelph. This collaboration was instrumental in effectively running the study in St. Thomas-Elgin, allowing us to share resources and reduce workload and costs.

The SWOLIP **Communications Roundtable subgroup** also met twice to share promising practices and learnings about communications in a LIP context. STELIP hosted the second Roundtable and shared information about reaching newcomer and immigrant audiences.

The SWOLIP **Workforce and Employment subgroup**, in partnership with WILL Immploy, hosted a webinar for Welcoming Week. More information can be found in the Workforce Development and Employer Support section.

The STELIP Manager continued to attend **Western Ontario Wardens Caucus (WOWC) Economic Development Committee** as a representative of SWOLIP. This committee includes Wardens from the rural counties of southwestern Ontario and representatives from various ministries: Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade (MEDJCT); Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA); Workforce Planning West; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Regional Tourism Organizations; and South Central Ontario Region Economic Development (SCOR).



Pathways to Prosperity National Conference and National LIP Conference

The 2023 Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) and National LIP Conference was held in Montreal in November. The conference, entitled, “Exploring Innovation in Immigration and Settlement in Canada: Challenges and Opportunities of New Geographies, Modes, and Levels of Immigration”, offered an opportunity to connect with hundreds of service providers, LIPs, RIFs, government representatives, researchers, and others in the immigration sector.

We **presented at the National LIP conference** along with other representatives from LIPs across Canada about how an innovative partnership allowed seven LIPs to implement the Immigrant Survey. The partnering LIPs also developed a toolkit about implementing community surveys to share learnings and promising practices with other LIPs and community partners.

National LIP Secretariat

We continued to take part in the National LIP Secretariat (NLS) trainings and planning sessions, including:

- Community Data Program-Immigration Data Portal: Orientation to ICARE, IMDB and 2021 Census Data Tables, Dashboards and Infographics
- Moving Beyond Words: What You Can do to Advance Truth & Reconciliation Commission work
- National LIP Secretariate Summit
- Outreach and Data Collection: Best Practices to Engaging Newcomers in Canada
- Anti-racism and the LIP Structures Series: Let’s talk about immigrant lived experience in LIP

We are also part of the committee that administers the LIP Basecamp account. The committee meets quarterly to expedite the registration of LIP staff and other stakeholders to Basecamp and help facilitate important connections and conversation. This committee also supports connecting LIP staff to the Settlenet.org platform and specifically to the LIP group on the platform.

Committee Representation

We also continued to participate in a range of workplace, local, and regional committees to ensure the needs and perspectives of immigrants are considered in planning and implementation:

Workplace

- YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee

St. Thomas and Elgin Specific

- [Elgin Ontario Health Team](#)
- [Elgin County Drowning Prevention Coalition](#)
- [Community Action Network](#)
- Elgin Children's Network
- Elgin St. Thomas Workforce Development Network
- [Community Conversations](#)

Regional

- London Economic Region Workforce Advisory Committee
- [Southwestern Public Health - Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment](#)
- Low German Speaking Mennonite Community of Practice of Elgin, St. Thomas, Oxford, and Norfolk (LGSM COP)
 - LGSM COP Steering Committee
- Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships
 - SWOLIP Employment Subcommittee
 - SWOLIP Communications Roundtable
- [Western Ontario Wardens Caucus Economic Development Committee](#) (SWOLIP Representative)
- 211 Discrimination Reporting Committee





Communications

Communication is central to our success. Everyone has a role to play in building a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community, and that means local residents, services, and businesses need to be aware of our work. Communication is the foundation for collaboration and partnership, which allows us to implement successful initiatives and develop relevant resources. We communicate through various channels, tailoring each message to its intended audience to increase effectiveness.

Website

We saw 4117 unique visitors to our stelip.ca website between April 2023 and March 2024. Some of the most popular pages were the Walk With Me 2023, Immigrant Survey 2023, and Global Flavours pages.

We also manage the welcometoste.ca website. This website was developed to help people learn about the region, particularly if they are looking to move here. The website includes links to key resources, videos of local newcomers sharing their experiences, and immigrant-specific information. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the site had 5889 unique visitors.

Newsletter

A total of four newsletters were sent over the course of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, in May, September, November, and February. The newsletters highlighted news and events related to immigration and integration from STELIP, our council member agencies, other local organizations, and IRCC. As of March 2024, we have 324 subscribers to our mailing list, an increase of six subscribers since this time last year.

Social Media

We are active on Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn.

Our primary audiences are community members and local service providers, which both encompass our council members and other community partners as well. Our secondary audiences include businesses, newcomers, and elected officials.



X (Twitter)

Number of Followers	385
Number of New Followers in 2023-24	8
Number of Posts	128
Cumulative Impression	4823

Facebook

Number of Followers	1000
Number of New Followers in 2023-24	99
Number of Posts	143
Cumulative Reach	34528

Instagram

Number of Followers	902
Number of New Followers in 2023-24	98
Number of Stories	100
Number of Posts	115
Cumulative Impression	3709

LinkedIn

Number of Followers	86
Number of New Followers in 2023-24	23
Number of Posts	18
Cumulative Impression	1100

Notable Social Media Campaigns

Immigrant Survey Results

We summarized the results of our immigrant survey in seven posts, looking at demographic, education and employment, income and housing, service use, connection and integration, and challenges and solutions highlights. We visualized these highlights through infographics, with additional written summaries for each topic. This series was developed to share key highlights from the immigrant survey with a broader community audience.

Microaggressions

This series highlighted common microaggressions and explained how those phrases were discriminatory and hurtful. This series also tied into our promotion and recruitment for the qualitative experiences of discrimination study; each post also linked to the pre-screening survey and more information about the project. It was our hope to emphasize the fact that microaggressions are indeed discrimination, and that anyone who had experienced such microaggressions was also eligible to participate in our discrimination study if they were interested. We created this series in response to feedback that potential research participants felt their experiences of discrimination were too small or insignificant to be eligible.





Challenges and Opportunities

St. Thomas experienced growth at double the rate of province between 2016 and 2021 (10.1% vs. 5.8%), and St. Thomas-Elgin as a whole grew 6.5%. With major industrial development in electric vehicles on the horizon, the community is preparing for growth, which brings both challenges and opportunities.

Growth necessitates planning to ensure the community will continue to have the services needed to support its population. It goes beyond economic planning—ensuring there is a large enough workforce whose skills match job opportunities—and also includes ensuring there are sufficient corresponding community services, like healthcare, childcare, and housing. There is critical need across many different community services: shortages in childcare workers, low housing availability coupled with growing rents, and challenges in finding family physicians to name a few. These are interrelated challenges, which will necessitate interrelated, cross-sectoral solutions.

This growth also means our communities will likely see an increase in immigrants to fill workforce needs; as a result, employment supports for immigrants will be more important than ever. While our settlement agencies provide the bulk of direct immigrant support, we will also need to work together as a community to equitably address immigrants' needs and support their integration. Immigrants are part of our diverse population and contribute positively to our communities. Ensuring adequate support for immigrants in this period of growth will likewise strengthen their ability to contribute to our collective community.

There will also be an impact on everyone who provides support and services in this region, including us. As the needs grow, we may find ourselves stretched thin and our capacity limited to meet our community's increased needs. We will need to be intentional about eliminating duplication and collaborating in a way that increases our efficacy.

As our population grows, so do communication challenges and opportunities. As the communication landscape continues to change and local media continues to dwindle, we find ourselves having to be increasingly creative and adaptable in how we communicate with our community. While it may be harder to reach a larger population, there may also be more people who are interested in our message and our work.

Unfortunately, we continue to see discrimination in our community, as is evident in both our Immigrant Survey and the Experiences of Discrimination in St. Thomas-Elgin-Oxford

report. Discrimination in all forms can make our communities hostile to newcomers and immigrants and negatively impact their integration process. As a community, we must continue to address discrimination—to talk about it, raise awareness, and hold perpetrators accountable. The recommendations contained in the Experiences of Discrimination report provide a tangible starting point to address discrimination. We will also continue to explore the implementation of discrimination-reporting tools in our community.

If we continue to collaborate effectively and wholeheartedly as a community, we can face these challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and develop creative and adaptable solutions.



STELIP Council & Project Team

STELIP is a collaborative community initiative. Our work is guided by our council, which comprises community members and representatives from local agencies and organizations. The council met five times over the course of the fiscal year, providing direction on projects, giving perspectives on community trends, and collaborating on relevant community initiatives.

STELIP Council

Central Community Health Centre	Catalina Friesen
Elgin Business Resource Centre	Jennifer Grigg
Elgin County Economic Development	Carolyn Krahn
Elgin County Library	Séanin Steele (Chair)
Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board	Emilian Siman
Employment Service Elgin	Jodi Annett-Kish
Fanshawe College Community Career and Employment Services	John Griffiths
Fanshawe College St. Thomas/Elgin Campus	Melanie Neerhof
Mennonite Community Services	Anna Bergen
Newcomer Representative	Chiyemenma Kejeh
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs	Serena Viola
Service Canada	Élisabeth Brito
St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce	Paul Jenkins

St. Thomas Economic Development/ Small Business Enterprise Centre	Mike Kerkvliet
St. Thomas Elgin Social Services	Teresa Sulowski
St. Thomas Police Service	Samantha Wakefield
St. Thomas Public Library	Dana Vanzanten
St. Thomas Islamic Centre	Zeeshan Ejaz Syed
Thames Valley District School Board	Michael Tamasi
WILL Immploy	Devin Munro
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin	Shelley Harris
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services	Juliane Hundt

STELIP Project Team

Fiona Murray	STELIP Communication Coordinator
Petrusia Hontar	STELIP Project Manager
Shelley Harris	Director of Education and Settlement



Acknowledgements

As our community adapts to its current growth and prepares for future growth, we would like to pause and recognize the work being done to make St. Thomas and Elgin a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community.

We are especially grateful for our council members for the expertise, knowledge, skills, and resources they bring to STELIP. They work to build bridges, partnerships, and collaborations across sectors to better support immigrants in our community.

Increased immigration into Canada, including special immigration measures, has resulted in more people accessing settlement and language supports in our region. This community has been well supported by the dedicated and passionate staff at Mennonite Community Services and the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services. We thank them for their continued work.

We especially thank Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada for their funding and commitment to supporting immigrant integration in communities across Canada.



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