

# Building community through immigration



Immigration Partnership Annual Report  
2023-2024



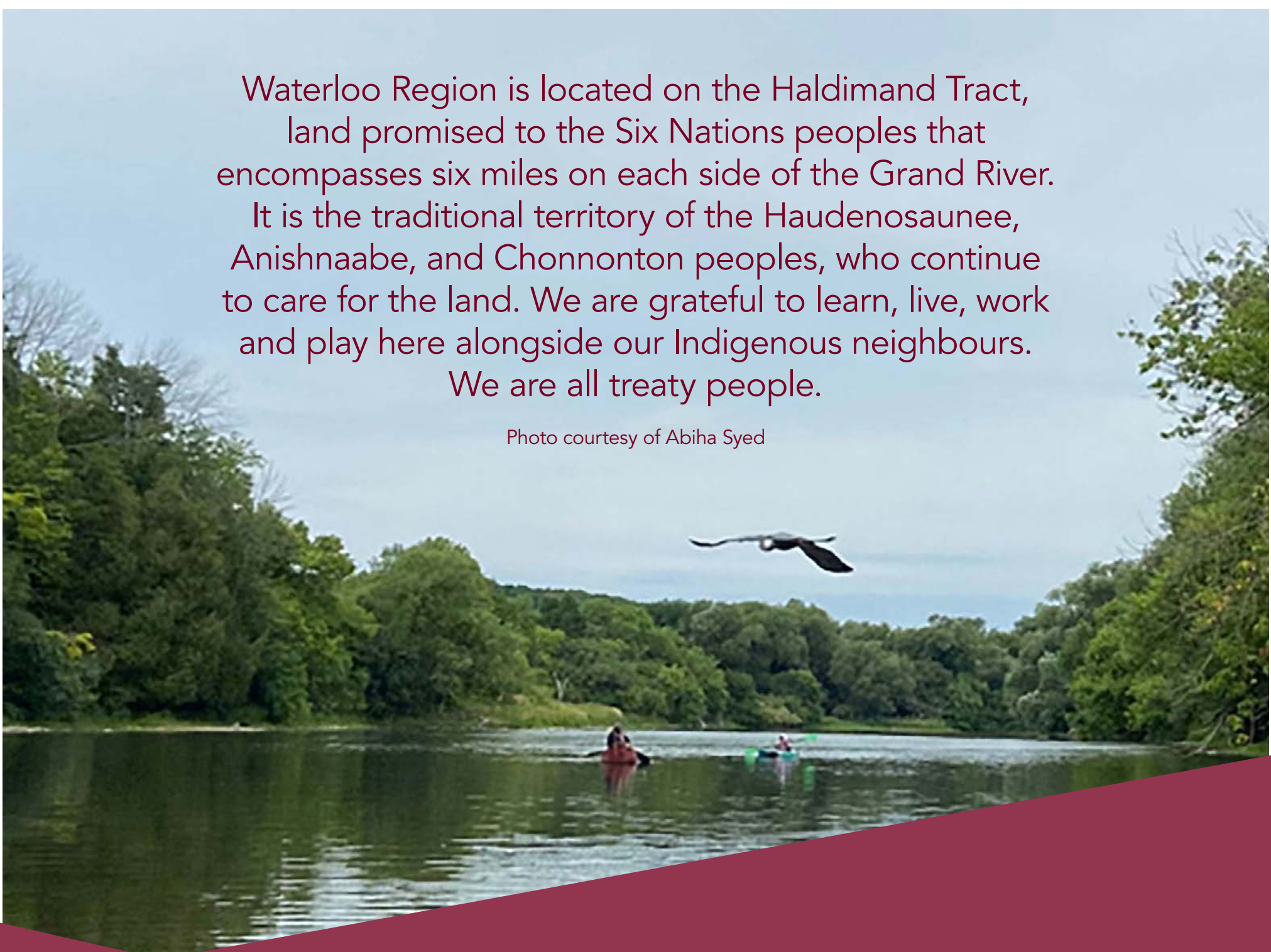
# Table of contents

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- Territorial acknowledgment ..... 4
- Waterloo Region: A welcoming community ..... 5
- A message from Tara Bedard, Executive Director, Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership ..... 6
- About the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership ..... 7
- Partnership-wide ..... 8
- How we build community ..... 10
- Regional leaders share insights on future growth and immigration ..... 11
- Driving policy, service and investment change through data: 2023 Immigrant Survey ..... 13
- Settle, Work and Belong ..... 15
  - Settle ..... 16
  - Work ..... 21
  - Belong ..... 26
- Our community partners ..... 33
- What positive impact from our collaborative work on immigrants, your organization or the community overall in the last year? ..... 34

Waterloo Region is located on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Six Nations peoples that encompasses six miles on each side of the Grand River. It is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe, and Chonnonton peoples, who continue to care for the land. We are grateful to learn, live, work and play here alongside our Indigenous neighbours. We are all treaty people.

Photo courtesy of Abiha Syed





## Waterloo Region: A welcoming community

[Citizenship ceremony to mark Welcoming Week - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2023/09/citizenship-ceremony-to-mark-welcoming-week.html)

*The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, will welcome 48 of Canada's newest citizens from 13 countries.*

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Newsroom, September 2023

[Over 300,000 people became Canadian citizens in 2023 | CIC News](https://www.cicnews.ca/over-300000-people-became-canadian-citizens-in-2023/)

Community Citizenship Ceremony hosted by IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) and the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership at the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum, September 2023.

# A message from Tara Bedard, Executive Director, Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership

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This report marks year four of Waterloo Region's five-year strategy for building community through immigration. It was a year of getting back together and norm-setting post-pandemic. It was a year of responding locally to community pressures resulting from 10 years of significant change to immigration policy and levels and pushing upper levels of government for stronger planning and investment in the community infrastructure needed for immigrants and others to thrive.

Canada had another year of record high immigration, welcoming over 471,000 new permanent residents and more than 700,000 new temporary residents. So did Waterloo Region. Across our regional communities we welcomed nearly 10,000 of new economic immigrants, sponsored family members, and refugees fleeing war and conflict, plus over 70,000 Ukrainians fleeing war, refugee claimants, international students, migrant workers and other temporary visa holders.

This year, we asked immigrants to tell about their experiences of living in Waterloo Region, and almost 1,700 responded. Our network of partners and allies have begun to translate what they told us into changes in policies, services and investments. Our Refugee Task Force continued, and a Migrant Workers Coalition launched. Our partners and the talented team that supports to our collective work continued to adapt with evolving community needs, working together to ensure all immigrants are able to reach their highest potential.

This report is a tribute to our many partners and the growing immigrant community helping make Waterloo Region a better place to live for everyone. Check it out.



- Tara Bedard, Executive Director



# About Immigration Partnership

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The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership has served as a catalyst and platform for collaboration across organizations to strengthen community through immigration for 15 years. Through the Immigration Partnership more than 60 immigrant and community service, business, municipal, post-secondary, ethno-cultural and other organizations work together to create the conditions for immigrants to succeed.

A Leadership Council and three Steering Groups (Settle, Work, and Belong) lead this work, supported by a dynamic staff team. They embody shared leadership principles and engage in collaborative research, community engagement, public education, advocacy and more.

## Our Vision

Immigrants reach their full potential and contribute to creating and sustaining a thriving, prosperous community for everyone.

## Our Mission

We work together to create the conditions for immigrants to succeed and help build a welcoming, dynamic community.



The June Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership Council meeting.

“  
[Head of K-W Multicultural Centre reflects on changing landscape for newcomers | CBC News](#)  
*It became clear to me ... that helping people settle in the community was not the job of settlement agencies. We had a role to play, but the entire community needs to come together to help people settle. The school boards, the hospitals, the businesses, it's much broader, for someone to feel welcomed, for someone to do well in this community,*  
- Lucia Harrison, CEO of the Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre and Inaugural Chair of the Immigration Partnership Council  
”

# Partnership-wide

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The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership Council oversees strategy and governance, champions the Partnership's work in the community, and advocates for change in systems, policy, services and investments. It fosters shared leadership for collective action in Waterloo Region and beyond and amplifies the work of the Steering Groups.

“  
*Immigration has and will continue to be a key driver in Waterloo Region's growth and success.*  
- Karen Redman, Chair of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Region, February 2023  
”

## Immigration Partnership Council:

Dr Ernest Osei (Chair), Community Member

Brittney Emslie (Vice Chair), KW Multicultural Centre

Tracey Hare Connell (Past Chair), The Coaching Co.

Anna Schwarz (Settle Steering Group Chair), YMCA of Three Rivers Immigrant Services

Ian McLean (Work Steering Group Chair), Greater KW Chamber of Commerce

Shannon Markle (Belong Steering Group Chair), Idea Exchange

Brian Kamm, United Way Waterloo Region Communities

Dauda Raji, House of Friendship

Katherine Peterson, YMCA of Three Rivers Immigrant Services

Michael Doroshenko, Community Member

Murray Gamble, The C3 Group of Companies

Peter Sweeney, Region of Waterloo, Commissioner, Community Services

Shannon Down, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Trish Weigel Green, Conestoga College

Conal Vaughan, Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (ex officio)

Andrea Hopkins, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (ex officio)

## 2022-2023 Alumni:

Lucia Harrison, Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre; Prof Margaret Walton Roberts, Wilfrid Laurier University; Janet Stanley, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (ex officio)

## Strategic and operational staff leadership:

Pauline Peng, Dan Vandebelt, Diana Carrillo Joya, and Tara Bedard

## Priority actions:

1. Champion advocacy and engage elected officials, systems and policy leaders
2. Build awareness of the Immigration Partnership and beneficial impact of immigration
3. Lead collaborative learning and community education
4. Break down silos within the Partnership and the community for immigrant and community success



“  
*Ella’s connection to the work of the immigration partnership has allowed us to forge new relationships, cultivating awareness of both the issues and the potential of newcomers in our community.*  
- Kathilee Porter, Ella Waterloo Region  
”



## How we build community

Settlement and other community leaders shared community challenges and policy and investment recommendations with the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Waterloo MP, the Hon. Bardish Chagger, and Kitchener Conestoga MP Tim Louis at a roundtable hosted by the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership, Sept 2023.

## Engaged government and other leaders in policy and investment change

IP created many opportunities for community leaders to plan for the types of changes needed as Waterloo Region grows to 1 million people, including a two-segment Immigration Forum with Greater KW Chamber of Commerce involving community leaders. IP hosted the Federal Immigration Minister, the Hon Marc Miller, in a roundtable with settlement and other community leaders and advocated for a range of federal policy and funding changes to address local challenges. IP and community partners engaged provincial health leaders to secure sustainable funding for medical interpretation so newcomers can get the care they need. IP and partners participated in federal and provincial budget consultations, making investment recommendations to help community organizations and others meet the needs of new immigrants. IP partners and staff also took part in many local, provincial and national planning initiatives to help Waterloo Region grow carefully, so all residents can thrive.

## Built community awareness of the Partnership and beneficial impact of immigration

IP actively increased awareness of the Immigration Partnership and immigration experiences in Waterloo Region through ongoing communications and diverse media channels. Our efforts include using new tools and networks to emphasize the importance and contributions of immigrants.

# Growth in 2023



[immigrationwaterlooregion.ca](https://immigrationwaterlooregion.ca)

**47,657** visitors (**25.7%** increase)

Data across all social media accounts:



Followers: **5,919**

Impressions: **220,975**

LinkedIn Releases: **8** ([click to view](#))

Curated Immigration Weekly Update:

**50** issues

**1,100** subscribers (**32.6%** increase)

**44%** open rate (**9%** increase)

**+2** new sections

La Communauté en Français with Francophone information, events, and services

The Workforce Corner with information for employers

[IP in the media](#) ([click to view](#))

# Regional leaders share insights on future growth and immigration

## Immigration: The Way Forward (March and May 2023)

In March 2023, the Immigration Forum kicked off with a strong start bringing together community leaders to deliberate on preparing Waterloo Region for future population growth and increased immigration. Community leaders, such as Karen Redman, Chair of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Region, emphasized immigration as a key driver of regional success. The event featured a panel discussion on healthcare, with Tony LaMantia and Ron Gagnon shedding light on the roadmap for improving healthcare infrastructure.

In May 2023, leaders gathered to discuss crucial issues related to the region's growth, with an emphasis on supporting immigrants to realize their economic potential. The Ontario Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, the Hon. Monte McNaughton provided insight on government initiatives, while a dynamic panel of post-secondary leaders included University of Waterloo President Dr. Vivek Goel and ApplyBoard's Massi Basiri explored the challenges facing international students and immigrants, proposing strategies to improve retention.

Both segments of the 2023 Immigration Forum highlighted the region's commitment to inclusive growth, recognizing immigration as a driving force. From healthcare infrastructure to government initiatives, the discussions mapped the path to a more supportive and inclusive community where immigrants thrive and contribute significantly to Waterloo Region's success.

The Immigration Forum was held in partnership with the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce.



The Ontario Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, the Hon. Monte McNaughton and Ian McLean, CEO of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce at the Immigration Forum, May 2023.

“Data produced by the IP helps us make decisions about services (i.e. languages requested in translation, response rates within certain linguistic populations to surveys).  
- IP Partner”

## Used Data, Research & Evaluation as Tools for Change

Led by an Evaluation Advisory Committee and strongly supported by many community partners in implementation, IP conducted its biannual Immigrant Survey, which provided nearly 1,700 immigrants, refugees, international students and others the chance to help shape local, provincial and federal policy, services and investments so they and others can flourish. IP with worked with Waterloo Region Public Health to prepare a detailed regional Immigration Profile using Census, StatsCan, IRCC and other data. We engaged in university research partnerships and released a number of reports ([click to view](#)) as tools to support community and organizational strategic, investment, and service planning to proactively meet the needs of a growing and changing population. Partners provided feedback on IPs work and future focus in a partner evaluation, which is influencing future work and action.

### Evaluation Advisory Committee:

Prof Margaret Walton Roberts, Wilfrid Laurier University & Balsillie School of International Affairs

Eliseo Martell, Grand River Community Health Centre

Yasir Dildar, Monitoring and Impact Measurement, Mennonite Economic Development Associates

Mohamed Bille Hassan, Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health

Daniela Seskar-Hencic, University of Waterloo

### Strategic and operational staff leadership:

Dan Vandebelt and Tara Bedard

## Driving policy, service and investment change through data: 2023 Immigrant Survey

The Waterloo Region Immigrant Survey is a bi-annual survey for all immigrants, refugees, claimants, temporary workers, international students and their families to share their experiences of living, working and studying in Waterloo Region. The survey allows newcomers to share their experiences, struggles, diverse strengths they bring and contribute, as well as their suggestions for how to improve settlement and integration in Waterloo Region.

## What they said

**42%** of participants were not in housing that was suitable and affordable

**10%** felt Waterloo Region is not welcoming and like they did not belong

**67%** did not have enough income to meet their needs

**26%** were quite isolated

**49%** were in jobs below their skill and experience level

**34%** did not feel safe

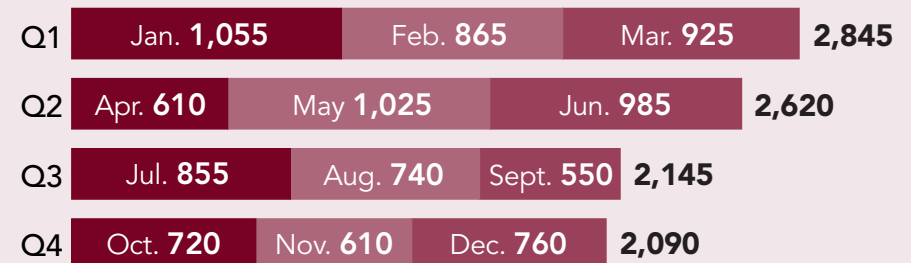
**44%** of those who needed interpretation to access health care were not provided such

**24%** experienced discrimination

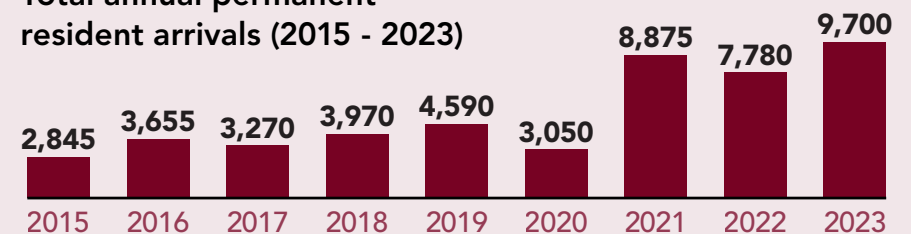
**38%** were unsure or did not plan to stay permanently in the region

### Other data:

In 2023, **9,700** new permanent residents arrived in WR:  
Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates



### Total annual permanent resident arrivals (2015 - 2023)



## Led collaborative learning and community education

In 2023, IP informed more than 40 community strategic plans, partners or local groups with shared data and expertise on the experiences of immigrants in Waterloo Region. IP provided specific survey and census data to support various initiatives, such as shelter proposals, employer presentations, and settlement partner activities. IP also helped build equitable research capacity through shared outcomes measurement training and providing feedback on research proposals.

IP contributed significantly building immigration research capacity across Canada through multiple presentations to share expertise and collaboration with other Immigration Partnerships to expand the Immigrant Survey to other communities. IP staff co-led a National Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Secretariat (NLS) Research Working Group and led development of an NLS LIP Research Introductory Guide for more than 80 LIPs across Canada.

## Broke down silos for immigrant success

In 2023, IP worked to break down silos in many ways. IP continued to convene the IP Council Refugee Task Force where leaders across settlement, housing, education, health, and community integration problem solve for Waterloo Region's most vulnerable newcomers. IP convened regular meetings of settlement executive leaders to facilitate collaboration and alignment.

IP engaged more than 40 community partners in a series of preparatory sessions in the lead up to the 2025-2030 federal immigration call for settlement funding proposals. Organizations worked together to understand and predict community needs and apply for increased federal funding of regional immigrant services starting in 2025. As a result, many existing and new applicants were able to put forward funding proposals. IP also hosted a consultation on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Canada with currently funded service providers to address challenges and explore opportunities for service improvement.

IP collaborated with other partnership initiatives locally and beyond like the Children and Youth Planning Table and Southwestern Ontario LIPs, undertaking shared initiatives to increase our impact. IP also continued to administer almost \$1.2 million in funding for 28 initiatives supporting refugee and immigrant economic well-being.



Settlement leaders at the Settlement Funding Preparatory session hosted by the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership.

“Being involved in the [federal immigration funding] conversations have allowed conversations to take place about power, influence and new and better ways to work across the community.

- IP Partner

Settle



Work



Belong



# Settle



The Settle Steering Group (SSG) works together to support the community integration of immigrants by addressing transitional hurdles faced when arriving in Waterloo Region.

## Settle Group Partners:

Anna Schwarz (Chair) and Marian Rozman, YMCA of Three Rivers Immigrant Services

Charlene Mak (Vice Chair), International Student Advisor Group and Wilfrid Laurier University

Zeri Zigeta (Advisory Chair), Kinbridge Community Association

Ajirioghene Evi-Cobbinah, Kind Minds Family Wellness

Alana Banton, Nikolett Agoston, Sheryl Mascoll and Vanessa Allen, Region of Waterloo Children's Services

Almira Hodzic, Laura Stoutenburg, Natalie Hughes and Xiaoshuo Gao, Conestoga College

Ana Luz Martinez and Brittney Emslie, Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre

Angie Pham, Imtenan Abd-El-Razik, Jennifer Ardon and Shannon Down, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Babur Mawladin and Lynne Griffiths-Fulton, Reception House Waterloo Region

Candace Brown and Cyntia Bratan, University of Waterloo

Carolyn Beukeboom, The Centre for Family Medicine

Dauda Raji and Nermin Ozdemir, House of Friendship

Debbie Engel, Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health

Duaa Al-aghar, Muslim Social Services

Eliseo Martell, Community Member

Erica Dudzus, Kitchener Public Library

Faduma Musse, Somali Canadians Association of Waterloo Region (SCAWR)

Hoda Ghonim, Shore Centre

Isaiah Ritzmann, The Working Centre

Janet Heimpel, Michele Breault, Pauleen Payne and Sandra Kuppek, St. Louis Adult Learning and Continuing Education Centre

Jean De Dieu Basabose, Collège Boréal

Prof Jenna Hennebry, International Migration Research Centre and Wilfrid Laurier University

Lidia Gomez, English at First

Linda Terry, Age Friendly Waterloo Region Network

Mayada Abou Warda, Community HealthCaring Kitchener Waterloo

Priscilla Muzira, AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area

Shelley Campagnola, COMPASS Refugee Centre

Siba Al-Khadour, Levant Canada

Shadrach Kamyori, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

Shariqua Raza, Muslim Women of Cambridge

Wisam Osman, Coalition of Muslim Women KW

### Working Group Members:

Abdirisak Ali and Maymuna Mohamed, Somali Canadians Association of Waterloo Region (SCAWR)

Ailton Santana, Inova Living

Aleksandra Petrovic, David Alton and Michelle Knight, Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

Alexandra Gottardo and Janet McLaughlin, Wilfrid Laurier University

Ashley Schuitema and Cynthia Iheanacho, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Brittany Bridge and Madeline Gritzan, Region of Waterloo Housing and Community Services

Cynthia Mora and Eduardo Huesca, Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers

Edwina Toope, Lutherwood

Emma Jennings, Reception House Waterloo Region

Evangelynn Chee and Kristen Thompson, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Joanna Mullen, Mississauga Community Legal Services

Katherine Peterson, YMCA of the Three Rivers

Lorraine Hamilton, Collège Boréal

Mark Willcock, Indwell

Melissa Ryan, City of Kitchener

Nicole Pereira, Supportive Housing of Waterloo

Steph Goertz, Waterloo Region Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis

Tera Dargavel, Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre

Crystal Cormier, Diane Wiles, Farida Allie, Community Members

### Corresponding Members:

A Edwina Toope, Lutherwood

Erica Dudszus, Kitchener Public Library

Melissa Ryan, City of Kitchener

Crystal Cormier, Community member

### 2021-2022 Alumni:

Jenni Wagler, COMPASS Refugee Centre

Lesline Fehr, Conestoga College Language Institute

Yesenia Torres, City of Cambridge

Michelle Lee, City of Waterloo

Andrew Ramsaroop, City of Kitchener

Lisa Haskins, Waterloo Region Grassroots Response

### Strategic and operational staff leadership:

Saba Shafiq and Dan Vandebelt

### Priority actions:

1. Develop communication tools and strategies to simplify service systems and pathways for immigrants
2. Brand “settlement” and drive collaboration and innovation within the sector
3. Leverage service providers and planning tables as effective immigrant supports through strong relationships and collaboration
4. Activate networks of private stakeholders in serving immigrants

Moving into the latter half of IPs Community Action Plan for Building Community through Immigration, the Settle Steering Group (SSG) applied learnings from IPs Immigrant Survey, other data tools and partner experiences to hone in on four areas of focus for the next two years: Access to Basic Needs, Access to Health Care and Mental Health, Access to Services Regardless of Immigration Status, and Addressing Language Barriers.

### **Developed communication tools and strategies to simplify service systems and pathways for immigrants**

SSG convened community partners through various groups related to language appropriate and accessible services in Waterloo Region. Through collaboration, several resources aimed at simplifying service pathways for immigrants and building service system capacity to support them were updated and shared.

The Top Languages for Interpretation and Translation in Waterloo Region guide was updated using census and service data. Many local organizations consulted this guide to select languages to include in addition to English in service and community outreach planning. The English Learning Options in Waterloo Review Overview guide was also updated. Settlement workers and others use this guide in connecting immigrants to the best options to improve their English. The “Interpretation Best Practices Checklist” also continued to be shared to support organizations in improving interpretation policies & practices.

### **Strengthened collaboration and innovation within the settlement sector**

SSG’s Waterloo Region Migrant Workers Coalition (WRMWC) is collectively working on a new website to address service gaps for migrant and temporary workers, providing links to key supports. The group problem solved emerging issues such as health care gaps for migrant workers with precarious status. The WRMWC conducted a survey of local organizations to understand available (and not available) services and resources for migrant workers and others with temporary immigration status and explored an arts-based outreach strategy. The WRMWC also connected with an organization from Toronto funded to provide services to this population in Waterloo Region and explored possibilities for future direct funding procurement for service in the region.

SSG also launched a Brown Bag Learning Series to increase the knowledge, resources and tools available to front line workers in their work serving immigrants. The first session took place in February, addressing Access to Health and Mental Health Services. There, local system leaders shared information and resources with more than 100 front line workers and answered many questions put forward by participants.

# How we built community

## **Participated in planning initiatives to grow immigrant supports**

SSG staff and partners engaged in numerous planning initiatives to impact the settlement, integration and wellbeing of immigrants and others at a systems level.

On health, partners and staff collaborated with the KW4 and the Cambridge and North Dumfries Ontario Health Teams through Steering and Working Group participation and presentations, with a focus on funding sustainability and expanding the use of medical interpretation, and primary care willingness and capacity to take on refugee and immigrant patients. IP also worked with Public Health to help build outreach strategies targeting newcomers to increase school mandatory vaccination rates.

On housing, partners and staff participated in service planning discussions led by the Region of Waterloo with settlement, emergency shelter and housing providers to address the increasing number of refugee claimants accessing the emergency shelter system, and in forming partnerships and planning for the allocation of targeted housing subsidies to help claimants move from shelter to market accommodations. SSGs Immigrant Housing Working Group (IHWG) maintained connection to housing and other action tables to advocate bring forward immigrant experiences in community planning, including a consultation by United Way Waterloo Regional Communities.

In late 2023 the IHWG convened its own consultation on the volatile housing market, the housing challenges of immigrants and refugees, and all the work on housing happening through the IHWG and regionally. The aim was to explore the best role for IP and the IHWG around housing and build out the focus of this work going forward.

## **Engaged networks of private stakeholders in supporting immigrants**

SSG continued to support efforts to engage private stakeholders in supporting immigrants, with emphasis on landlords and family doctors.

Through its annual Newcomer Award, the Immigrant Housing Working group continued to engage and recognize the significant role of landlords in enabling new immigrants to make their home in Waterloo Region. Past recipients are encouraged to engage in this work and help build the network of landlords offering space to some of the region's most vulnerable residents. The IHWG also stayed connected to the [Waterloo Region Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis](#), a local group of about 250 volunteers supporting hundreds of Ukrainians fleeing war now living in the region. Efforts focused on helping connect them to existing community systems, partners, and groups to access language, housing, and other vital supports for displaced Ukrainians in Waterloo Region.

Partners and staff also supported efforts by the Centre for Family Medicine and Community HealthCaring Kitchener Waterloo to secure additional funding for their refugee health clinics with a focus on primary care attachment and patient transitions.

## Recognizing landlords that help immigrant find home

Immigration Partnership presented the 2023 Newcomer Landlord Award on November 22 as part of the Region of Waterloo's National Housing Day Celebration. Founded in 2016 in response to an outpouring of support for Syrian refugees, this award recognizes landlords that go above and beyond to provide innovative, flexible, caring and affordable housing solutions for immigrants in Waterloo Region. 2023 saw significant increase in the number of nominations, reflecting growth in the number of people making a difference in the lives of newcomers. Nominated by the community and selected by a committee including past awardees and community partners, four recipients were honoured for their impactful role in helping the newest members of our regional communities find a place to call home.

The 2023 honorees included Armando Camarata, Bill Hall, Zain Valani and Nancy Morales.

**Armando Camarata**, a landlord in Waterloo Region, has been praised by his tenant, Hussain Mahammad, for his exceptional support and kindness. Armando helped Hussain's family settle into their new home in Canada without a credit check, provides free repairs, and regularly visits to understand their needs.

**Bill Hall**, inspired by a newspaper article about refugees facing housing challenges in Canada, sought guidance from former Landlord Award winner Lisa Weiler. He then took the initiative to provide safe, permanent housing for Ukrainian refugees, successfully supporting a family in settling into Canada, securing jobs, enrolling in school, and adjusting to their new life, all while fostering a strong bond and advocating for others to do the same.

**Zain Valani** and **Nancy Morales** support newcomers by offering affordable housing and employment opportunities. They've helped dozens of individuals, partnered with local groups like Waterloo Region Grassroots Response, and urge other landlords to allocate immigrants and refugees.

Read more about their inspiring stories of generosity: [2023 Newcomer Landlord Award Stories](#).



Tara Bedard announcing the Newcomer Landlord Award recipients at the National Housing Day ceremony, November 2023.

# Work

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The Work Steering Group (WSG) works together to maximize the economic contributions of immigrants by equipping employers with resources to hire and retain immigrant talent and to address the challenges of some immigrants to finding meaningful employment or starting a business.

## Work Group Partners:

Ian Mclean (**Chair**), Greater KW Chamber of Commerce

Sheila McIntosh (**Vice Chair**), Community Member

Charlene Hoffbauer, Workforce Planning Board Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

Elizabeth Arcila, Orange Sky Enterprises Inc.

Eltag Elkhalfi, Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre

Isabel Vankuik, Scotiabank

Janet Lehman, Ontario Drive and Gear

Jonathan Hendel, Region of Waterloo Economic Development,

Jordyn Leith, Wilfrid Laurier University

Julie Newman, Willow Hall HR

Katrina Michielsen, Conestoga College

Kristin Sainsbury, City of Waterloo Economic Development

Ksenia Osmolovskaya, City of Waterloo, Small Business Centre

Laura Pearce, City of Cambridge Economic Development

Marsha Schlueter, Mentorship Program, YMCA of Three Rivers

Lisa Yuhasz, University of Waterloo

Mohamed Bille Hassan, Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health

Roberto Villamar, Community Member

Sue Benoit, H2R Solutions

Tuba Begum Bilgesu, Power of Trades, YMCA

Tina Baksh, Conestoga College

Fadhwa Yusaf, Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Naudia Banton, City of Kitchener, Economic Development/Small Business Centre

Natalie Cooper, Region of Waterloo Employment and Income Supports

**Strategic and operational staff leadership:** Nora Whittington

## Priority actions:

1. Develop campaigns and tools to market the value proposition and economic contribution of immigrants to employers
2. Foster cohesive service to employers and immigrant job-seekers across sectors and talent
3. Engage networks of employers to hire and retain immigrants
4. Collaborate with leaders and organizations (public, private and not-for-profit) leaders to foster immigrant attraction, employment and entrepreneurship

## WSG Highlights from 2023

### A new immigrant talent hub for Waterloo Region: Workplace and Immigrant Network (WIN)

For the last four years, WSG worked on the concept for an immigrant talent hub in Waterloo Region. A task group consisting of employers and employment service providers completed research, surveys, consultations and more to understand employer needs and confirm desire for one stop access to immigrant talent especially those that are skilled/professionals. After several years trying to identify a neutral host to secure funding, launch and deliver the program, the vision finally became a reality in 2023. The Workforce Planning Board Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin stepped forward to develop the initiative and secured two year funding to pilot the hub through the Immigration Partnership Council's Immigrant Economic Wellbeing Fund and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The program launched in September 2023 as the Workplace and Immigrant Network – WIN, with staff hired in the summer. WIN provides support to immigrants to navigate the Canadian job market and works with employers to attract and retain global talent. The goal is to integrate global talent to fuel business success. WIN offers many services to both employers and jobseekers, and conducts learning workshops and networking events.

WINs first year has been incredibly successful and the Workforce Planning Board is planning for expansion. This has been another significant achievement for the Work Steering Group, which acted as the incubator and continues to act as the advisory group into WIN.



Workplace & Immigrant Network launch event facilitated by Charlene Hofbauer.

[New program looks to connect immigrants, employers in Waterloo Region](#)  
*WINWR's mission is deeply rooted in creating a powerful centralized network that unites employers, immigrants, and local partners, fostering an environment of inclusivity and resilience within workplaces.*  
- Charlene Hofbauer, Workforce Planning Board executive director, Waterloo Region Record, September 2023

## Learning Events for Employers: Strong partnerships with other Southwestern Ontario Immigration Partnerships

This began during the pandemic and has continued. Together we looked at ways to offer virtual employer learning workshops. We created a committee that worked on several webinars. The Immploy staff team, London, Ontario with IP staff on the planning team, coordinated this. These continued during 2023, even though there were more in-person events that began to take place. We held webinars in the winter and spring of 2023 focusing on Francophone immigrant job candidates as a source of talent for employers as well as what employers should know about work permits, hiring international students and LMIA. We also held an in-person event in partnership with Immploy in the fall of 2023 in Waterloo. This employer workshop was 'How to use Storytelling as a way to attract immigrant talent'. Each of these sessions attracted 40-90 employers who now have information that can assist them in successfully attracting and retaining immigrant talent to their organization.

WSG continues to look for ways to support immigrants and employers including the creation of a Work Experience program currently being reviewed.

## An Employer Playbook to help #immigrantswork

This 3-year partnership with World Education Services (WES) began early in the pandemic when the Immigration Partnership reached out to ask WES about their new #immigrantswork social media campaign. That inquiry turned into conversations leading WES to select three communities and create a playbook for employers to recruit, hire and retain immigrant talent. The communities were Waterloo Region, Durham Region and Moncton, NB. Over a series of meetings and consultations with employers and community, this digital Employer Playbook was created. The Playbook helps employers access information and resources to support them in accessing, hiring and onboarding diverse talent.

In 2023, the Employer Playbook launched in Waterloo Region. It was promoted to regional employers in event and online. WES and IP staff and partners presented the Playbook, partnership and process at several conferences across Canada. Employer and service provider focus groups were subsequently held, where very positive feedback was provided. Employers and others see the value in this tool. This resource is maintained and updated by WES, and the relationship with WES will continue in the future.

As Foundational Partners, WSG members guided the process and development. This has been great achievement of the steering group in providing resources to reduce barriers between employers and immigrant talent. The Employer Playbook is a free resource to share with colleagues and employers in Waterloo Region and beyond.

[Waterloo Region Playbook - World Education Services](#)



Nora Whittington, Community Engagement Coordinator with the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership at the 'How to use Storytelling as a way to attract immigrant talent' workshop.

### **Engage networks of employers to hire and retain immigrants**

In the past year, WSG continued its role of raising awareness among employers about the invaluable contributions immigrants bring to their organizations. Our primary focus was on emphasizing that immigrants are here and ready to contribute to the workforce. We examined processes and systems to make it easier for employers to access this pool of talent and establish connections. Engaging with employer partners witnessed continued growth, particularly as talent acquisition became more challenging across various sectors. Our close collaboration persisted with KW Multicultural Centre's WR Connectors Program, YMCA's Mentorship Program, Reception House, and all immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. These partnerships allowed us to stay updated on the challenges and developments they faced, contributing to a more comprehensive approach in supporting employers to hire and retain immigrants successfully.

### **Collaborated with leaders to foster immigrant attraction, employment and entrepreneurship**

WSGs ongoing partnership with regional economic development teams provided valuable insight on current activities and planned strategies. This collaboration facilitated a dynamic exchange of knowledge about immigration and immigrant talent, enhancing our collective understanding.

Led by Immploy, based in London, ON, we worked with other Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships to help employers across the region to build capacity for hiring and retaining immigrants.

Our continued collaboration with the Small Business Centre involved promoting their workshops and fostering connections with immigrant service providers, reinforcing support for immigrant entrepreneurs. Working closely with the Job Developer Group, CELC (Community Employment and Literacy Council), and occasionally the Brown Bag Lunch group, we actively contributed to their efforts in supporting immigrant job seekers.

We participated in many business and learning events to strengthen our connection to the business community and deepen our understanding of the persistent challenges employers face in finding suitable talent across sectors.

Expanding our network, we welcomed new WSG members from the University of Waterloo, the Catholic School Board, and the Region of Waterloo. Our commitment to sourcing partners across the region continues as we progress in the realms of employment and entrepreneurship. This includes exploring potential partnerships with the Grand River Construction Association and Food Bank. The idea of creating a work experience program for immigrant and refugee job seekers is currently under consideration.

# How we built community

## Promoted the value and economic contribution of immigrants to employers

WSG promoted the value immigrants bring to our community's economic landscape through strategic ad placements in Chamber of Commerce newsletters, directories, social media, and events. WSG actively promoted immigrant talent through events and publications hosted by the Greater KW and Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, sponsoring webinars, community awards, and other key activities. We collaborated with the Greater KW Chamber on their podcast: Behind the Business, physician recruitment efforts, and various events throughout the year, participating in Business After 5 events with immigrant employment partners. IP social media engagement continued to raise awareness related to hiring immigrant talent and the economic impact of immigration.

WSG staff and partners continued to contribute to the Greater KW Chamber's DEI committee, sharing ideas and resources, and helping recruit new committee members. Through this committee, IP is helping to survey Chamber members for best practices and ideas for DEI initiatives and storytelling.

“

[Immigration in Waterloo Region: Our Future State, May-June Advocate2023 by Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce - Issue](#)

*New immigrants bring a wide range of skills, experiences, connections, language capacities and other talents that are enriching our regional communities and workplaces. Many are highly educated, working age individuals that come to Canada with their families to pursue employment and educational opportunities that offer a good life for themselves and future generations. They start businesses and employ others and give back to our communities in many ways.*

- Tara Bedard, Executive Director of the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership, May 2023

”

## Fostered cohesive service to employers and immigrant jobseekers

Throughout the past year, IP staff worked closely with employment service partners and employers to build the bridge for immigrants to access meaningful employment. Managing referrals from the Waterloo Region Immigration website, we connected employment service partners with diverse talents for various job postings, ensuring a seamless bridge to employment. Additionally, we tracked employers interested in further connections. Our ongoing partnership with the Workforce Planning Board involved marketing their FindyourJob.ca job board and discussions about the future inclusion of more immigrant hiring, networking, and resource tools.



IP booth at Libro Business After 5: Farwell 4 Hire event, May 2023.

# Belong



The Belong Steering Group (BSG) works together to unleash the vibrant and diverse community contributions of immigrants by addressing long-term challenges to developing a strong sense of belonging in Waterloo Region.

## Belong Group Partners:

Shannon Markle (Chair), Idea Exchange  
Rihanat El-Alawa (Vice Chair), Waterloo Region District School Board  
Brittney Emslie (Past Chair), KW Multicultural Centre  
Ajirioghene Evi-Cobbinah, Kind Minds Family Wellness  
Alam Zafor, Rohingya Centre of Canada  
Allie Fallis and Sheryl Tilley, Region of Waterloo Libraries  
Amy Slack, Cambridge Food Bank  
Aoussaf Arrout and Marwa Gebeil, Kinbridge Community Centre  
Arcy Canumay, Sustainable WR Travel Wise  
Babur Mawladin, Reception House Waterloo Region  
Cheryl Faria, Nikolett Agoston and Sheryl Mascoll, Region of Waterloo Children's Services  
Cheryl Grove, Region of Waterloo

Daniela Montoya, Volunteer Waterloo Region  
Emily Gray and Jessica Their, Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health  
Emily Jaarsma, Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre  
Fadhilah Balogun, CCORIC member, African Women Alliance of Waterloo Region  
Fauzia Wafai, Islamic Circle of North America-Canada and Muslim Women of Cambridge  
Fidelia Ukueje, Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo (NIROW) and Children and Youth Planning Table  
Jennifer Sullivan and Mary Dowhaniuk, City of Kitchener  
Julia Gingrich, Waterloo Public Libraries  
Marian Rozman, YMCA of Three Rivers – Cambridge  
Marie-Pierre Daoust, Conseil scolaire catholique Mon Avenir  
Mifrah Abid, Coalition of Muslim Women KW  
Paulina Rodriguez, City of Waterloo  
Pamela Rojas, Community Member  
Willy Tchuilen, Conseil Scolaire Viamonde  
Yolande Lansing, Canadian Arab Women's Association  
Zohra Wali, City of Cambridge  
**2022-2023 Alumni:** Heather Montgomery, Reception House Waterloo Region

**Strategic and operational staff leadership:** Abiha Syed

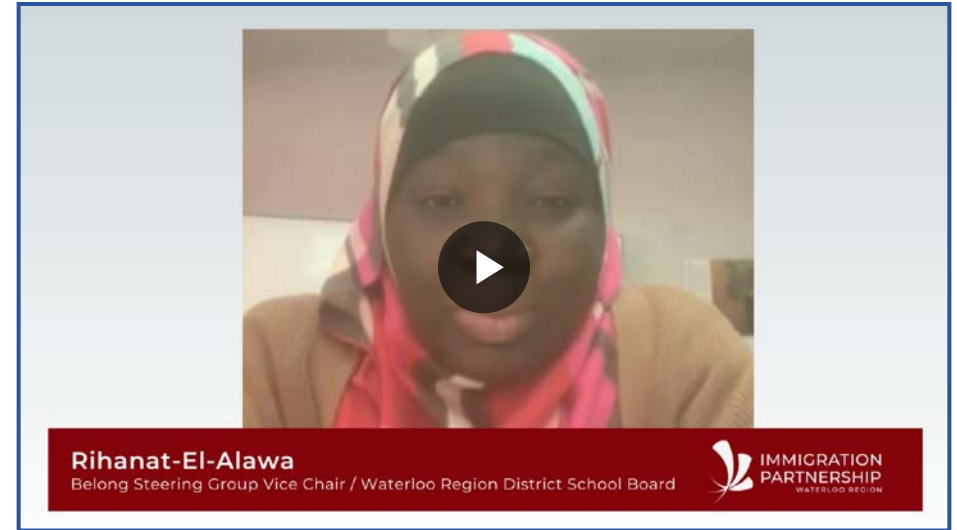
## Priority actions:

1. Build connections, capacity and civic engagement among ethno-cultural groups to increase immigrant influence in policy making and social connectedness
2. Work with municipalities and other public sector partners as leaders and advocates to strengthen immigrant welcoming, inclusion and engagement
3. Increase public support for immigration, and action to address racism, discrimination and foster immigrant belonging through campaigns and initiatives
4. Collaborate with systems and community tables and leaders

## Increased immigrant influence in policymaking and social connectedness

The Belong Steering Group (BSG) planned and hosted the 2023 Multicultural Connections event, featuring grassroots cultural organizations from across Waterloo Region. Hosted in May at the Kitchener Public Library and in partnership with KW Multicultural Centre, Multicultural Connections 2023 aimed to shift focus and power to grassroots organizations and ethno-cultural members, who were able to showcase their services and programs to mainstream service organizations and others. Eighteen ethno-cultural organizations and 12 service providers participated as booth hosts, and event attracted over 150 attendees. It was an opportunity to foster connections, build relationships, and offer support to local ethno-cultural groups. Attendees experienced an Indigenous traditional dance, fostering a cultural bridge between immigrants and Indigenous communities.

BSG actively joined and facilitated the direct participation of ethno-cultural leaders in planning and other discussions impacting the lives of immigrants and refugees across Waterloo Region, such as the Poverty Reduction Fall Forum at KPL and the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington consultation on reducing barriers to service access.



# How we built community

## **Supported municipalities and other public sector partners to strengthen immigrant welcoming, inclusion, and engagement**

BSG provided support to municipal partners and others, shared resources, networking, and connections between partners that contributed to service changes and enhancements. These connections and supports helped area municipal partners in their efforts to introduce or expand language interpretation services in municipal settings (i.e., City of Waterloo), target outreach to specific cultural communities (i.e. Public Health), or engage more diverse speakers in events and services from specific newcomer, racialized, and language groups to foster a sense of belonging and community building for immigrants and refugees.

BSG worked closely with the City of Cambridge to plan the 2023 Newcomer Connections Health & Wellness Information Day. This initiative was open to the public and aimed to address the holistic well-being of newcomers by providing essential information and resources. BSG meetings rotated through regional communities to enhance relationships across the regional geographies. A BSG meeting at the Idea Exchange Old Post Office in Cambridge included a guided a tour by the BSG Chair.

## **Worked to increase public support for immigration, address racism and foster belonging**

Through regular discussion and reflection, BSG partners worked to make Waterloo Region more inclusive. In discussion and in workshops, public events and messaging, BSG addressed hate crimes, incidents, and racism at individual, organizational and community levels.

In the spring, BSG's Public Education Working Group advanced its #RacialEquityWR social media campaign to engage residents, local businesses, and community partners in creating a welcoming and anti-racist environment. The campaign participated at the KW Multicultural Festival and Elmira's first Multicultural Festival to reach more people with the message of racial equity.

In September, BSG engaged community partners in celebrating Welcoming Week, a global initiative that it is gaining momentum in Canada at the encouragement of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. This second year of participation saw 15 partners hosting events for over 600 participants centred on celebrating diversity and building welcoming in our region.

The Working Group also hosted the 7th annual Waterloo Region Migration Film Festival. This annual event showcases different stories of migration and engages participants in open discussions about how those experiences relate to life in Waterloo Region. In 2023, around 400 community members participated in 13 screenings where they expanded their awareness of migration experiences and were challenged to help build a more welcoming community for all.



Host Heyo: te'dok sharing captivating stories, accompanied by professional singers and dancers performing indigenous dances at Multicultural Connections, May 2023

## BSG Highlights from 2023

### A Welcoming Week Citizenship Ceremony

In partnership with the Ken Seiling Museum of the Region of Waterloo and Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada, we celebrated Welcoming Week with a citizenship ceremony for 48 new Canadian citizens. The event was attended by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Hon. Marc Miller, and several regional elected officials including MP Mike Morris, Mayors Dorothy McCabe, Sue Foxton and Sandy Shantz. This marked Canada's fourth national observance of Welcoming Week and participation continues to grow.

[Welcoming Week - Immigration Waterloo Region](#)

### March 21st International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

This event, held at the KW Multicultural Centre, featured speakers Vanessa Oraekwe and Brittney Emslie. The conversation centered on advancing the anti-racism movement and shedding light on Indigenous reconciliation work in newcomer-serving agencies. Vanessa Oraekwe, a community development practitioner and consultant, focused on building capacity within organizations and communities for anti-racist change. The event included lunch Cedar Spoon Indigenous Catering. Chef Destiny Moser shared her journey of discovery of the rich Indigenous cultural history and nutritional wisdom. She also raised awareness about systemic barriers preventing people from accessing authentic Indigenous foods. Simultaneously, the Kitchener Public Library provided valuable anti-racism resources that attendees could check out.

Approximately 48 individuals attended. By learning from community leaders and collaborating with peers, attendees left the event with innovative ideas and strategies to promote anti-racism within their organizations and the broader community. This event is part of IP's ongoing effort to build a community that embraces diversity and equity, working together, challenging ourselves, and learning from one another to make progress towards a more inclusive society for all.



Members from different organizations engaged during the March 21st International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

# A partnership that goes above and beyond (Waterloo Region)

- **National Small Centres Conference in Epekwitk, Prince Edward Island – June 2023**

Abiha Syed (IP staff) and Brittney Emslie (IP council member) presented the workshop “Building Capacity: Simplifying the journey of small centre attraction and retention of immigrants through an antiracism, diversity and equity lenses” at the National Small Centres Conference in Epekwitk (PEI). The work of the BSG was shared as a case study highlighting some of the antiracism and reconciliation work happening in Waterloo Region through the KW Multicultural Centre and the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership. The workshop provided ideas, tools, and resources to inspire small centres across the country to engage in this important work, to make sure everyone feels welcome and that they belong in their own community.

- **Pathways to Prosperity Conference in Montreal, Quebec – November 2023**

Immigration Partnership team members, together with partners from YMCA Immigrant Services, took part in the national Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) conference, an event dedicated to shaping evidence-based settlement and integration policies across Canada. Two of IP’s team members shares the innovative approaches and successful initiatives from Waterloo Region on a national stage. Dan Vandebelt, together with other Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) representatives, shared insights on the potential for mutual learning among LIPs. This included initiatives such as the Immigrant Survey and other surveys, providing perspective on the importance of research for community capacity building. Abiha Syed facilitated a meaningful workshop entitled “Rural LIPs: Building Capacity from Within”, providing her expertise during the panel discussions from collaborations across Waterloo Region’s rural and urban communities and organizations.



Abiha Syed (IP staff) and Brittney Emslie (IP council member) presenting at the National Small Centres Conference in Epekwitk (PEI).

- **OCASI Professional Development Conference in Toronto – October 2023**

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) Professional Development Conference in Toronto was an opportunity to present experiences from Waterloo Region with frontline workers and managers to strengthen organizational capacity to support newcomer integration across Ontario. Abiha Syed and Brittney Emslie presented a workshop titled “Strengthening Organizational Capacity: Advancing Anti-Racism, Equity, and Reconciliation Work through Partnerships between Settlement Orgs and Local Immigration Partnerships.”

- **World Education Services’ Annual Convening Conference, Washington D.C, USA – November 2023**

Representatives from Immigration Partnership’s across Canada who have been partnering with World Education Services attended the WES annual CONVENING conference in Washington in November. IP team member Nora Whittington participated in this learning event, where she joined others in sharing experience with the #immigrantswork and Employer Playbook initiative. Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership was part of the first cohort of the #immigrantsWork project, which helped grow interest from other parts of Canada. In Washington, we were able to share about the Playbook and the work with WES since 2020. We learned what is happening with WES partners across the USA in the area of immigrant employment. We heard outstanding speakers talk about the challenges, change and plans to make a difference. This relationship with WES continues as we partner to market the Employer Playbook.



Abiha Syed and Brittney Emslie presenting at OCASI Professional Development Conference in Toronto.

# Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership Partner Survey: Evaluating ongoing work, impact and future focus

This infographic outlines findings from the [Immigration Partnership \(IP\) Partner Survey](#) conducted in December 2023. 14 respondents.

## Partners continue to feel the Immigration Partnership is having a **positive impact** in Waterloo Region

**93%** felt that IP is focused on the critical issues for immigrants in our community

**93%** felt that IP is a catalyst for effective change

**100%** felt that we are achieving the IP mission

**93%** felt that immigration is increasingly seen as a priority in planning and implementing policies, services and systems.

**67%** felt that Waterloo Region has become more welcoming of immigrants

## Partners will concentrate on IP-related work in the upcoming year, with a focus on:

### Housing and affordability

- Addressing **housing and affordability challenges** for immigrants through tailored programs and initiatives.

### Advocacy, integration, and diversity appreciation

- Continuing **advocacy, collaboration, and promoting** community benefits of immigration.
- Actively **combating anti-immigrant** sentiments.
- Planning for the future with a focus on **immigrant integration and well-being**.
- **Expanding partnerships** with various stakeholders for diversity appreciation.
- Reviewing resource allocation to ensure **equitable distribution**.

### Representation and cultural dialogue

- Encouraging **increased representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** in organizations.
- Fostering events and initiatives for **networking and learning between diverse groups** to promote diversity appreciation.
- Organizing regular community dialogues on racism to **address issues and promote understanding**.

### Empowerment through skills

- Initiating programs on digital literacy to **empower immigrants in the digital age**.

### Access and inclusivity

- Ensuring fair access to services by providing **language support for immigrant communities**.
- Promoting engagement to **understand and address the unique needs** of immigrants.

### Workplace diversity and well-being

- **Enhancing workplace diversity** through targeted outreach efforts.
- Establishing and **expanding mental health services** tailored to cultural needs.

# Our community partners



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# What positive impact from our collaborative work on immigrants, your organization or the community overall in the last year?

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What **positive impact** from our **collaborative work** on immigrants, your organization or the community overall in the last year?





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