

# Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Project Impact Report

## **“The settlement journey from a newcomer’s perspective”**

Written By:

Joel Bronstein  
Jasica Grewal  
Carmen Miranda-Barrios  
Mehak Sharma

## **Introduction**

Little Mountain Neighbourhood House has been an integral part of the Little Mountain/Riley Park area for the past 39 years, by providing needed community services and facilitating community engagement and leadership development. We strive to provide the highest quality services in the broad program areas of; child care, family resources, child and youth, seniors, settlement, food security and community. The organization is guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, human rights, accessibility and accountability. We are committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive community, encouraging community engagement at all levels of the organization.

## **Settlement Programs**

Since 1990, Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society (LMNH) has been facilitating newcomers and refugees in their journey to start a new life in Metro Vancouver. Our services include one on one orientation sessions and workshops on different aspects/issues related to settling in a new country. Our team of Settlement Workers ensures newcomers' needs are addressed and met in at least seven different languages (including English) in a respectful and welcoming environment. Little Mountain serves an average of 450 newcomers annually.

## **Intended Impacts**

We evaluated four key impact areas within our settlement programs. The impacts are focused on newcomers' sense of self and their engagement and contribution to community. A thorough list of indicators is located in Appendix A.

### **1. Newcomers have a sense of belonging at LMNH**

**What we mean:** Settlement is a process. Newcomers regularly attend programs/share new experiences/have a space to build connections, find commonalities and appreciate differences.

### **2. Newcomers are experts in navigating community systems for themselves and others**

**What we mean:** Newcomers know of community services; they are independently accessing services and are able to advocate for themselves. A key indicator is confidence. It is a great achievement for newcomers to the country to learn new community systems. It is an integral part of their settlement process and it builds on their skills to become peer mentors and support other newcomers.

### **3. Newcomers co-create their experiences**

**What we mean:** Newcomers are not passive recipients of services, instead they are active participants. Newcomers are co-authors of their experience. They are involved in one or more activities at LMNH.

### **4. Newcomers develop habits of civic engagement**

**What we mean:** Newcomers know their rights and responsibilities. They actively contribute to their community. They know how to engage in different systems (such as voting, committees, volunteering).

## **Evaluation Methodology**

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind, and the quality of impact we are having with the population we are serving. Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, (b) designed and implemented both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, and (c) identified findings and considered the implications of those findings for program adjustments and renovations.

This project began with a focus of identifying and clarifying the intended impact of one of our signature settlement programs. Once the ideas had been developed, and indicators identified, we then designed a questionnaire to collect data about quantitative measures and a qualitative interview protocol to collect qualitative data (see Appendix B and C). These data were analyzed and themes were identified and then translated into findings. From the findings, we developed program responses.

### **Qualitative Data and Analysis**

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from our program. We identified a sample of subjects using a purposeful stratified technique to select a representation of the population we served. Our population size was 425. Our sample size was 25 and we drew our sample from the following strata of our population: (a) Newcomer to Canada; (b) In our Settlement Program for minimum of one year; (c) a range of backgrounds and languages (English, Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese).

We then convened one-on-one interviews lasting between 45 minutes and one hour in length. Data were collected and we applied a four-step model of textual analysis to each of the interviews. This process allowed us to interpret the meaning and significance of the interview data. We then examined the overarching themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the primary insights and discoveries. The interview protocol is located in Appendix C.

### **Quantitative Data and Analysis**

We designed a questionnaire to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We administered this instrument to 36 settlement participants; 36 newcomers completed the survey. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency, gaps and the spread of distribution.

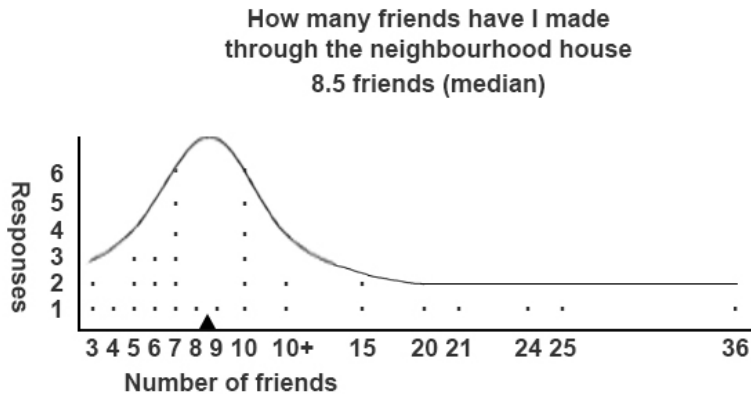
For purposes of this study, we focused our inquiry on all 4 intended impacts. Our quantitative surveys were translated into 5 languages including: Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese and English. The survey was administered online to all settlement service participants who have been involved in the neighbourhood house for more than a year and through hard copy at the time of their appointments. Surveys were administered through the Settlement Services team. An example of the questionnaire in English is located in Appendix B.

## **Findings**

### **#1 Home is where the Neighbourhood House is**

#### **Description**

We hoped that people feel safe, comfortable, and a sense of belonging when entering through the doors at Little Mountain. Through the interview process, many of these hopes were confirmed and expanded on. Newcomers involved in the settlement services department boldly stated over and over again in a variety of ways that this was their second home, this was their extended family, and that they love Little Mountain.



Graph 1: Our survey found the median # of friends made since coming to the neighbourhood house was **8.5**. This suggests that the connections made in settlement program extended beyond the service level to making connections with new friends from the settlement program and in the community.

We aspired to support newcomers with the relationships they have here and envisioned this would act as a catalyst for other positive settlement experiences throughout their journey. Our impact “Newcomers have a sense of belonging at Little Mountain Neighbourhood House” was confirmed and the deeper understanding of the impact ‘of belonging’ had on our clients is assuring. One client spoke of their connection to Little Mountain:

*“Coming here is like coming to see my relatives. [The staff] is extended family. That’s the same for my child. For example, when I come to Community Kitchen, I pass down [this tradition] to my family because I don’t have any family here; coming to the program is like visiting family. Sometimes, my child is like, I don’t want to go, can I play on the iPad instead, and I’m like we need to go, (laughter) so very much like visiting relatives. There is a negotiation there. It’s funny like to come here. “*

Important elements in their love for Little Mountain included positive interactions with their peers, the front desk and staff at all levels. We expected to hear that the Settlement Team made clients feel welcome through their diverse backgrounds, languages, and the way they interact with clients; but the unexpected theme evident throughout most interviews was the positive effects of the Little Mountain receptionist had on new and long-term clients. The receptionist is able to facilitate a comfortable space for one-time as well as long term clients. Interviewees mentioned that the lobby, at many times of the day, can feel like you have just entered a familiar living room because of the lived-in furniture, the smell of fresh coffee, the chatter of people moving from one room to another. For new clients, receptionist is their first advocate, ensuring they meet with the appropriate staff and their immediate concerns are addressed. This sets the stage for engagement with their primary settlement worker and programs.

Many interviewees highlighted their interactions with other staff through the neighbourhood house were also positive. Whether it was through an internal referral to attend a workshop or a friendly smile from the Executive Director, clients appreciated the feeling of familiarity that all staff contributed to.

*“It feels like home when I step inside Little Mountain. I belong here. This is one of very few places I feel instantly comfortable,”* remarked on client.

For this particular client, the sense of belonging came quickly and she realized that she wanted to be in this space as a volunteer or employee. Little Mountain provides clients with a sense of purpose and routine for themselves and their families (children).

### **Significance**

The importance of clients embracing Little Mountain as their home confirms the need for connection felt by newcomers. One settlement client highlighted the importance of connection through service approaches at the neighbourhood house.

*“Before coming here I was scared and I didn’t know how to start my immigrant life – now it feels like a big family. The teachers are very supportive and show us how to use community resources like a library card. If it wasn’t for this, I will be very depressed.”*

The possibility for the Little Mountain to play a cherished role in participants’ lives is embedded in our values as we support the layers of vulnerability in the settlement process for our clients. The neighbourhood house is mandated to provide services, but the staff went beyond traditional service approaches to make the information relatable and useful in their daily lives. More importantly, it is through attachment and trust that newcomers are open to these new and wonderful experiences.

### **Response**

The data revealed that newcomers’ experiences went beyond a sense of belonging to a deeper form of attachment, love; loving the neighbourhood house, the people, or feeling like this was a safe space, often equating it to home and family.

The data also surprised us with unprompted explanations of why they felt like this was a safe space, often because of the family living room atmosphere and because of the receptionist. We discovered that it is not only the explicit services and direct relationships that made newcomers feel like they belonged but often invisible experiences of a greeting that was the tipping point, (e.g. acknowledgement and a warm hello from other staff and engagement at all levels). We will use this information and relay the importance to all staff of how the environment is also supporting clients in their settlement journey.

Although the inside is a warm welcoming space, we recognize that the outside can be uninviting to clients who come for the first time. Our action plan for this is to freshen up the front exterior through a new awning, fresh paint and plants.

We will incorporate the idea of invisible experiences all staff contributes to, in our all staff meetings as an ongoing agenda item. Titled, ‘Community Conversations’ the leadership team will express the brilliant ways in which staff already exhibit a warm welcoming space, but also work toward other ways to support everyone walking into the Neighbourhood House. This will be an ongoing learning piece for all staff.

Space at Little Mountain is often crowded and staff were often working in close proximity. This is due to the expanding number of programs and lack of private offices. Although this may be a struggle at times for staff, the open layout of the house has aided in more face to face interactions with all clients, creating a warm, welcoming space.

## **#2 World Wide Wondering**

### **Description**

One of the core principles for Little Mountain as an organization is to continuously provide

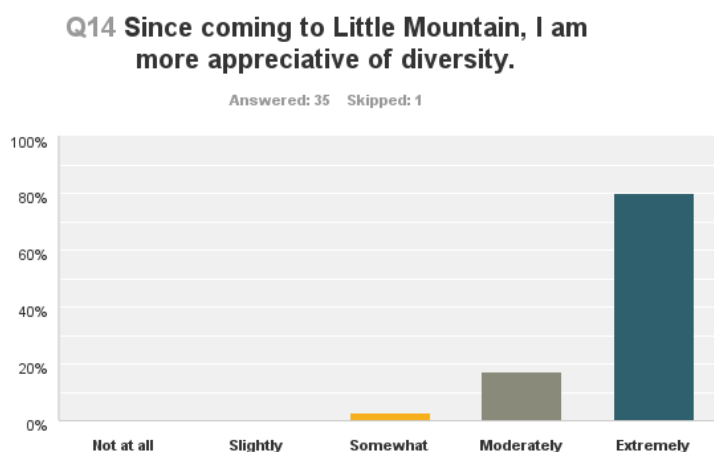
opportunities for clients to co-create experiences through the integration of their voice, which includes their culture, experiences and goals. Using experiential learning as a tool to facilitate an understanding and ultimately, appreciation for diversity.

The range of programs and clients allows many positive openings for engaging in multicultural activities with diverse sets of people and values. Clients were encouraged by this experience for a number of reasons, but primarily identified that these were real world opportunities for them to meet other newcomers from places all over the world. This level of engagement allowed clients to understand other cultures, and through similarities and differences, dispel longstanding myths they held while allowing opportunities for personal growth. One client remarked,

*“Before coming, I had the idea about Canada based on a book I received at the Canadian embassy in Colombia. Everything I read sounded so nice. But when I came here that beautiful thing changed. People said that in Colombia there is a lot of drugs and violence, but I never saw people in my city doing drugs in open air, for my children and for me that was a shock. Also, at times I had to go to the food bank and never imagined seeing white women in there. But coming to LM, I started learning why those situations were happening.”*

When newcomers come to Canada, they meet many people from various backgrounds. Depending on whom newcomers interact with and whom they have access to inform their experiences of Canada and what makes up Canadian culture. Newcomers are able to take pieces of various cultures, depending on who they meet. This informs their opinions based on their experiences. Newcomers are also an integral component of contributing to and informing people’s ideas of what Canada is like and of Canadian culture. Newcomers add their own identity to the cultural framework or cultural fabric of Canada and define what it is to be ‘Canadian.’

*Graph 2. Over 95% of respondents stated they were more appreciative of diversity since coming to Little Mountain. This suggests that their positive exposure to diverse populations assist newcomers in their settlement integration journey.*



Clients also described the value of sharing their traditions and culture with their new family and friends and how the supportive programs at Little Mountain helped them do this. Sharing significant cultural rituals was important to clients for a multitude of reasons. It allowed them to be authentic as they shared experiences that were previously mostly shared with their close family and friends. It also allowed people of diverse backgrounds to gain understanding and familiarity of other traditions. This was tremendously important to those who did not have family here.

## **Significance**

As clients reflected on their own cultural traditions they developed an appreciation and commitment to values and beliefs that they believe to be 'Canadian'. Through experiential learning, clients have also been able to make sense of self through a supportive community. They are making sense of community and how they see themselves as part of or not part of a community. Classes such as Citizenship, English language classes, and cooking all involve elements of sharing and co-creation.

Interviews revealed the struggle clients experienced of balancing not only their own, but their family, values with their home and new Canadian identity. One parent spoke of the struggles in raising a teenager as a new immigrant with minimal family or community support. The clash of identities created emotional and physical rifts between the two.

*"I will do anything for family, but when I had an accident my daughter did not take care of me. This does happen in my [home] country".*

This client had years of misunderstanding with her teenage daughter before finally coming to a parenting workshop offered to her by a Little Mountain Settlement Worker. Through time, she learned that her daughter had developed new ways of showing respect that she did not understand, and she took her independence as disrespect. She later realized the similar struggle her daughter was having in adapting to life in a Canadian context.

## **Response**

The data revealed clients were taking control of their own learning goals. The interviews illustrated clients are aware of their role throughout their own settlement process and are committed to achieving their goals. We set out to prove that clients were in fact, co-creators of their experience here but were surprised to discover that this was influenced by their access to diversity and multiculturalism. It was 'comforting' to hear that most of interviewees spoke of the new skills and tools they gained through the Neighbourhood House and their stories of implementation with their family, friends and work. The practical skills were practiced and often times newcomers described situations where it was met with an unfavorable response but they endured, building resiliency. It was surprising to discover that through Little Mountain's support and their participant's tenacity, they were able to build capacity within them and (attempt) to use these tools to support their families' settlement process.

We plan to continue the intentional influence of diverse cultural and language opportunities for clients. We will look for funding to expand community programs that offer new ways for clients to engage with one another. Some examples of enhanced services include: potlucks, open space cafes, dialogue circles and more celebratory events.

## **#3 Beyond the basic "My name is...."**

### **Description**

Language is a tool that not only makes it possible to communicate with others in a society, but also a conduit for deeper expression of people's ideas, personalities, values, etc. Language allows humans to make social contact and to interact. When newcomers arrive in a new country learning the host society's language is a must in their list of priorities. Learning English is a task that all newcomers to the Anglo-speaking provinces of Canada must do in order to settle, integrate and feel a sense of belonging. Since our target population was required to have been in the country for, the topic of learning English was recurring as we spoke to people, who have been in the country for over a year.



It was surprising to highlight that English language learning is perceived by newcomers not just as a conduit of language to facilitate basic communication, but also as a tool for deeper understanding as stated by this interviewee:

*“I hope to speak English as well as I can speak Chinese. I want to communicate in a deeper way with people. I want them to know who I am deep down not just my basic information. This will help me feel less lonely in Canada.”*

The discussion of English language learning also opened up issues and exposed barriers from the perspective of newcomers who are enrolled in English classes and from the ones who are not. Little Mountain is one agency in the Lower Mainland that provides Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada [LINC], a free program funded by the federal government for permanent residents. This program aims to integrate adult students into Canadian society through English classes.

Newcomers who are registered in the program expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to be able to have daily English classes at no cost. Their younger children (18 months and up to 5 years old) are well cared for by professional childminders while parents attend class. However, some expressed learning barriers they faced e.g. going through difficult situations at home which blocked their ability to focus and learn, as stated by this interviewee:

*“I used to come and sit in the classroom, but my mind was not focused. I was so worried with my situation at home and the abuse I was going through, that I came just to be physically present but I wasn’t learning anything”.*

Interviewees shared that having the possibility to attend a variety of programs, not just English classes, offered different formats for them to use their English and helped them gain confidence to speak the language. Furthermore, workshops offered in specific languages (Vietnamese, Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese) also allowed participants facing difficult situations to be able to ask questions directly to professionals in different fields. With this process of gaining knowledge, they are able to face and resolve difficult situations such as domestic violence for example. Some of our clients shared that:

*“I gained the confidence in speaking “broken” English, even though I am not fluent, I have gained the courage to ask questions, I repeat myself over and over again until people finally understanding me.”*

*“The settlement worker was not available today and I had to call my doctor’s office. I breathed deep and dial, and I manage to talk to his office and make an appointment. The person in the other line understood me!”*

For individuals that are not able to attend LINC classes, the main reason was their economic situation, as finding a new job can have more weight than learning English. Frustration was one emotion expressed by many interviewees. As one shared, *“If I don’t have good English, I will never get a better job. It is a vicious cycle, but I am glad you guys call me when programs are at night or Saturdays so I can come and participate.”*

## **Significance**

Many programs offered by Little Mountain opens the door for newcomers to be able to express what they think, who they are and which kind of ideas they can provide to really internalize the feeling of belonging to their community. This sense of belonging is important for newcomers because is a step forward to putting roots down, to be settled, and to become part of the social fabric in Western Canada.

*As one client said, "I feel like here with all the programs I learned to have the courage of going for it, to speak it. Before I was shy and I didn't talk much, but the teachers pushed me "to throw myself in the water". [It's an expression in Spanish that means that you learn by doing it]."*

The possibility of learning the host language, but also being able to speak their mother tongue allowed newcomers to really express who they really are and how they can contribute with their ideas, experiences and knowledge to their new communities.

It was expected that interviewees were going to express that when sharing their experiences among themselves as newcomers, the common language used was at times broken English. Nonetheless, the surprising part of the data showed that because most were English language learners, the anxiety of practicing a different language was minimized with positive aspects of connection and engagement.

## **Response**

Data revealed that traditional English classes are necessary and essential in a newcomer's settlement journey and this was a common theme that all our interviewees brought up. However, data also revealed that the approach to language learning/teaching should be based on an integrated and holistic manner. Through the findings, some newcomers expressed their frustration of not being able to attend LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes due to their schedule already working in low- paying jobs. One response is to start looking at the possibility of adding traditional English classes during the evenings or on the weekends. This strategy will allow newcomers who are may feel trapped into the decision of learning the language or putting food on their table to have options. There are other settlement organizations that already provide LINC classes on those schedules, but usually there is a long waiting list. Therefore, this response could impact positively on those clients who are working during the day.

Data also revealed that newcomers who are currently registered in traditional English classes, encountered bigger issues or challenges that blocks their learning. Therefore, we are committed to continue providing workshops and sessions on a variety of issues, including counselling sessions that can provide newcomers with strategies on how to deal with their specific situation. We will continue providing a holistic approach to services. But as a result of the present study, we are going to embark on a plan to deliver training to teachers and settlement workers, where teachers can share or provide context on what they observe during their LINC classes, and Settlement Workers provide cultural context related issues to teachers. This response will allow Little Mountain to create a deeper engagement between teachers and settlement workers and to start normalizing a program designed in a more collaborative way. Also, staff will be asked to continue welcoming newcomers and using English in an informal way, so newcomers will have an opportunity to practice English that is needed to have a successful settlement experience.

## **#4 Imprinting values**

### **Description**

Values are a set of principles and standards every society has. Over and over during the interviews, participants brought up the importance of what they have learned about Canadian

values ranging from concepts such as cultural tolerance, mutual respect, the opportunity of learning from each other, as well as the awareness of rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. Many mentioned these values were learned by taking part in several activities offered by the neighborhood house. The activities made them reflect on how these values are embedded in their settlement journey. In their interviews, clients described these shifts in values in various ways as seen in the following responses:

*"I can say that I went through a metamorphosis during the last 6 years because I have evolved in many senses. From not knowing anything about my rights as a woman all the way to be able to stand up now not just for me, but for my child's rights as well and for others who may experience domestic violence as I did."*

*"I have taken the role of ambassador promoting all the programs at the neighborhood house because here I shifted my parenting practices from less authoritative to a more positive discipline."*

*"Through programs that involve food, many of us have the opportunity to talk about our culture, our language, and our traditions. I know that we have to have mutual respect."*

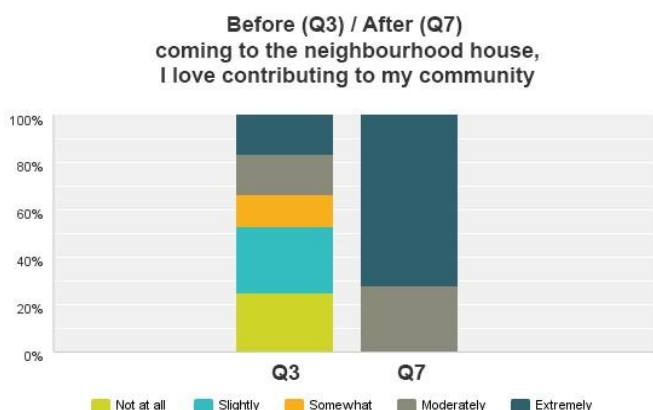
Because Little Mountain is open not only to newcomers but to members of the community in general, newcomers have the possibility to be part of many activities and events open to the public. Friendships have developed in an environment where newcomers have the opportunity to share who they are and their values.

Cultural understanding is specifically mentioned by our clients as a positive in Canada. Canada is after all "a land of immigrants" with the exception of Indigenous Peoples. Newcomers and long-time residents come and share how their ancestors came as migrants to this country. Through different collective projects, participants have the time to learn about each other's culture. This enhances the value of multiculturalism in Canada as well. Cultural tolerance is seen by our clients as a positive value in Canada because as one newcomer said, *"Learning from each other matters so we can [all] live in peace."* The surprising element in these findings was the fact that newcomers described becoming aware of the different values through a process that goes beyond making sense of their individual role to a sense of collective well being and citizenship.

Women rights were seen as one of the most sacred values by many of our interviewees. *"I am committed to really understand my rights as a woman in this country. For example I know that if I apply for a job, I don't have to send my picture, as in my country."* As one participant mentioned, she had no idea about the rights or responsibilities she had while she was living here; it was only when those rights were being taken from her that she was able to grasp what she was entitled to in Canada. Her experiences of interacting with domestic violence and navigating service systems enabled her to see how her rights were protected under the law. As many newcomers interviewed came fleeing from persecution, gender oppression, war torn countries, Canada represents a real opportunity to start again. This also includes newcomers' role in embracing not just their rights and freedoms but also responsibilities. One participant mentioned, *"I now have an awareness of why we have to pay taxes. I have been the recipient of the benefits."*

## Significance

Values are imprinted in all programs delivered through Little Mountain from civic activities, such as volunteering, to deepening the understanding of rights, freedoms and responsibilities everyone has in Canada. Newcomers are exposed to values through different formats, from learning specifics in a Canadian citizenship class, through their English learning process, to hands on practice in different workshops, to their socializing time with their peers. Specifically, volunteering was seen as a new value that at least 10 of our interviewees are practicing during the time of the interviews. Newcomers can see the benefits of volunteering because they are present in the Neighbourhood house. Therefore, they see the important impact at an individual and a collective level.



*Graph 3. As seen in the data above, respondents love to contribute to their community after coming to the neighbourhood house. Even with all the challenges newcomers face in their settlement journey, newcomers find time to give back to the community whilst coping with everything else in their adaptation process. Respondents told us that the form of contribution was most often volunteering followed by voting.*

## Response

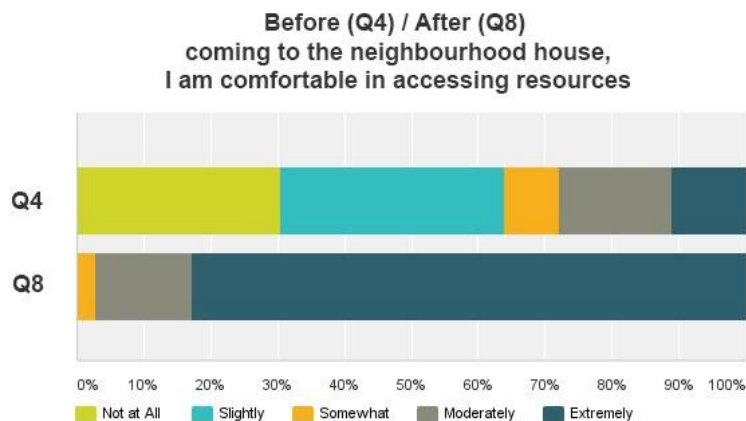
The findings magnify the importance of learning and putting in practice values from the newcomers' standpoint. Canadian values, freedoms and rights are relevant to newcomers. Therefore, a response to consider is to train staff to include them intentionally and explicitly in their planning and delivery of services (e.g., women's' rights, children's rights). Another response is to continue providing self-reflection based programs such as parenting workshops, where newcomers can analyze and reflect on different parenting styles. Workshops on rights at different levels can be planned and delivered in different languages, as a way to open up a discussion among newcomers on issues and finding strategies together. Since volunteering is a value embraced by newcomers, clients can also be referred to other agencies to volunteer as a way to expand their practice of volunteering, and at the same time increasing their social networks.

## #5 Learn, do, and repeat

### Description

Experiential learning means to learn by doing or from practice. The theme of hands on learning was present for many individuals, through their interviews, about how they were able to grow. Through experience and knowledge, participants were able to feel empowered and had a stronger sense of their rights and responsibilities. For many newcomers, learning new things was a process. Whether it was learning their rights, exercising new skills, or learning another

language, the practice of doing strengthened their mastery of skills.



*Graph 4. There was a significant shift in newcomers comfort accessing other programs and services. The majority of respondents (> 2/3) stated that before coming to Little Mountain they were not comfortable accessing resources. After coming to Little Mountain the responses indicate newcomers were comfortable accessing resources (>90% moderately or extremely). This suggests that through their experience of accessing resources, newcomers feel more confident as they have both the knowledge as well as the practice of navigating services.*

Interviewees mentioned repeatedly that because there were barriers in traditional forms of learning, newcomers had to be creative to learn English. The data suggests that English classroom learning would sometimes take away from paid opportunities newcomers needed in order to support themselves financially. Therefore, participants had to make tough decisions about whether they were going to learn the language in a formal classroom setting or whether they were going to find work. Luckily, learning the English language, like many other learning processes, not only happens inside a classroom. Many people were able to integrate English learning in their work by learning directly from colleagues and clients.

*One interviewee shared: “Before coming to the neighbourhood house I was scared and didn’t know how to start my immigrant experience. Now, it is my second home-big family. My English is still challenging and frustrating but I am not nervous anymore. I am confident and trying my best to practice my English at the neighbourhood house and in my own neighbourhood. I am happy I came here. If it wasn’t for all the celebrations here, I would be very homesick.”*

Through developing a sense of community, newcomers can ask each other for support. Through sharing stories of positive and negative experiences, participants help contextualize narratives for each other. They can help prepare each other for what to expect, what may be challenging or different than “back home.” This reciprocal learning allows community members to identify resources and expertise close to them. One interviewee made a powerful statement on her realization of identifying domestic violence as a social problem and not as an individual issue. She said,

*“Through making connections with each other’s situation through our own stories, plus the info provided here, I came to the realization that there are social problems that affect us women regardless of where we are coming from, but also helped me to learn and un-learned ideas I have before.”*

Through dialogue and sharing with each other, newcomers are able to connect insights to their lived experiences. As another women stated,

*“Here we can have a space. I came to a talk about women’s’ rights in Canada. The talk was in Spanish, and we ended up with our own group of Latino women.”*

One of the participants, Maria, is an expert in knitting.

*“We got together and with help from the settlement worker, got money to buy materials and knitted our own scarves and winter hats. I made more friends and we do things also outside the neighbourhood house”.*

## **Significance**

Settlement is a process. Newcomers are always integrating into new experiences, into new landscapes, and therefore always learning. Some newcomers talked explicitly about learning from each other. By participating or by volunteering, newcomers were able to build up their skills and gain experience doing something challenging or different. Through the interviews, multiple newcomers talked about applying for a grant and facilitating for the first time; others spoke about volunteerism. Little Mountain provides an opportunity for participants to be able to come to programs, as well as take on leadership roles. Through doing and practice, newcomers are able to move into other spaces such as building up their skills or an occupation.

## **Response**

Through the interviews, it is clear that experiential learning is a positive aspect of programming for participants. Staff integrate experiential learning through a very fluid, flexible process depending on time, resources, and relationships with the participants. To continue to strengthen this aspect for participants accessing our programs, staff must continue to be intentional about merging experiential learning into programming. This can be a small improvement such as having an open suggestion box for programming ideas available in an accessible location (e.g. front desk). Another idea is to have Little Mountain set aside stable funding every year to develop opportunities for newcomers to implement experiential learning opportunities and expertise. At the moment, the funding is on a project basis and depends on the Neighbourhood Small Grants to foster community- based initiatives. By having money set aside, staff can prioritize and address gaps in programming as they come up, garner community ideas, and have structured programs specifically for skill development and capacity building.

## **#6 Saying Goodbye**

### **Description**

Many newcomers leave behind their families and friends when moving to a new place. Newcomers fill the gap with the Neighbourhood House's settlement programs. They report this to be a place to return to; otherwise, unless they have family/friends, they would be navigating a new place alone. They speak about Little Mountain being a family and feeling comfortable here.

From the interviews, we noticed participants do not mention moving on from the neighbourhood house. They talk often about coming back. Thus one question may be, because newcomers don't mention moving on, are we as a Neighbourhood House, creating dependency? Participants frequently mentioned coming back and returning as participants, volunteers, peer liaisons or even becoming employees. The enmeshed work between employees and newcomers is complex; and a critique may be that more professionalized practice, and setting clear boundaries, would allow for better service provisions and resource management. Another assessment may be that having a comfortable space doesn't challenge people to move on, or to have uncomfortable experiences and learn from them.

Time is often a concern when coming to or continuing services. Within the settlement process, as newcomers are getting adjusted to feeling more connected, settled and establishing networks, there is a decrease in access to services as they do not need the same level of support any more. With the enhancement of community support and meeting new people in the neighbourhood, the data shows newcomers are motivated to build a better future for their families with financial stability. Although moving on is not expressly mentioned, it would seem that the strong relationships formed at the Neighbourhood House prepares newcomers to branch out to other things.

Through the interviews, participants express a theme of having more confidence in accessing services/programs and resources in the community as a result of being connected to Little Mountain. They are more aware of services they can access afterwards. Newcomers mention that although they are busy with their lives and other commitments, they know where to go and return to if they need some support as they don't have to find the resources themselves. They are no longer struggling with service navigation alone. Newcomers also often express their desire to come to other programs and invite other participants. As one participant shared,

*"Before I didn't know about programs, now I know about contributing back to the community."*

Through participating and coming back to programs, newcomers develop a sense of ownership, belonging, as well as identifying strengths they bring to their community. With participants returning to volunteer, to mentor, or participate in annual festivities once they are settled, newcomers are able to return the help that they once received. Many newcomers use their lived experience to help others in similar position to themselves. When volunteers return, it highlights the reciprocity of relationships between the neighbourhood house and the newcomers that they serve. This can be viewed as a sign of empowerment. Unlike other service providers, the neighbourhood house is a place-based community agency whose role is to provide a space for connection. Little Mountain becomes a point of departure and a point to return where people congregate when they need support and, or connection.

### **Significance**

It is important to highlight newcomers do not have to be totally detached from the neighbourhood house to move on. Here, they form friendships (see *Graph 1 on pg 3*) and connections with other people which stretch outside of the neighbourhood house. Newcomers start to give back to Little Mountain when they feel more independent and comfortable; they start to get involved in programs beyond settlement programs. Even though newcomers do still come back and participate in programs, their role evolves over time. Ultimately, the goal is to have clients who are confident, connected and supported rather than be totally independent, self-sustained, and "moved on."

### **Response**

This finding highlights the importance of staff being able to differentiate between being welcoming versus creating dependency as well as the challenges of maintaining and setting clear professional boundaries especially when language communities may be quite intertwined. This is not an area that the neighbourhood house has had time to address in a larger conversation. As an organization, we need to have to dialogue about where there may be challenges or ambiguities regarding staff roles and responsibilities. By having a larger spotlight on this issue, we can make meaning of the nuances, brainstorm alternative solutions and also provide appropriate training opportunities.

## **#7 Threads of connections**

### **Description**

Community connections for newcomers include connections between newcomers, connections between newcomers and locals, newcomers and staff, connections made here that extended outside Little Mountain and grow over time.

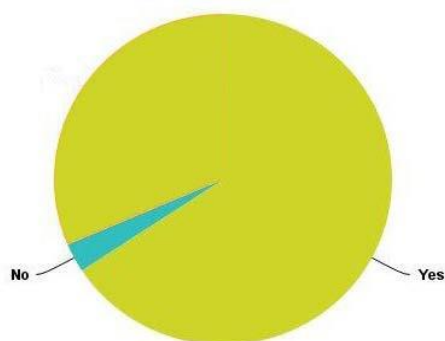
Many newcomers who have left their country expressed they didn't know what to expect when coming into a new country. As this client expressed,



*“From my perspective as a Latina, we always see countries like the USA and Canada as places of opportunities and rich living. But the image that we get outside is very different when you come and live here. It is not that easy”.*

Canada is a space of isolation where newcomers may not know anyone. Being an immigrant for many of the interviewees *“is hard, we have to learn a new language, a new culture, we all have problems.”* Community connections are important to not only foster emotional well being, but also to recognize the resiliency and agency immigrants have. By meeting other newcomers, immigrants are able to share skills and knowledge. Oftentimes, immigrants have a shared reality and process for adapting and settling in Canada. There is uncertainty about the future. Many participants reported that they enjoy connecting with each other and helping each other, as one person put it, *“I see myself in them.”* Being rooted in the community and starting to love the environment they are in begins from connecting to others.

**Q17 As a result of coming to Little Mountain, I can find more things in common among other newcomers**



*Graph 5. According to our surveys, 95% of survey respondents stated “As a result of coming to Little Mountain they find more things in common with other newcomers such as, language barriers and feelings of isolation. These findings suggest that the exchanges which occur in settlement programs help newcomers realize they are not the alone in their experiences and feelings.*

Many settlement clients report that through Little Mountain they were able to connect to other locals in their community. As one client said,

*“Little Mountain Neighbourhood House for me is like a community network, like a spider web that includes my creating my own Latino community.”*

By meeting people when accessing programs, newcomers reported that they were able to learn other points of view grounded in different lived experiences. These connections help build empathy and understanding. Through sharing, they often find support and make new friends.

Participants’ connections with staff foster trust. As one of the interviewees simply put it,

*“I learned to trust you because you showed me ‘good will’ by working as a team to help me out.”*

This results in building relationships over many years. Through continued support, staff are able to connect newcomers to other opportunities and programming outside of settlement services. Some newcomers who have been volunteering with the neighbourhood house are connected with projects such as the Neighbourhood Small Grants and other similar projects

that center the aim of the group on their interests. One woman in the Latino community expressed a desire to make something with her hands and had a talent with clothes. Women congregated and connected in this group to knit and sew different materials, and sell their goods to make a profit to support themselves.

### **Significance**

Through these groups, newcomers are able to co-create their own opportunities. They become a resource library augmenting an existing support system. By making community connections, newcomers have a network to tap into when they need support, like trying to find work. We believe that connections to others are ways for integrating and can help identify resources that help with isolation. For many newcomers, their connections with each other are also protective factors. They look after each other. They know each other's stories and they are able to ask questions based on each person's experience. Through the interviews, many newcomers specified examples of helping their peers, e.g. one interviewee was able to show her colleagues where to find inexpensive cultural food and groceries.

These connections extend outside of the Neighbourhood House and grow over time. One woman spoke about her experience needing a space to sleep when she was fleeing violence, and through her friends, she was able to spend a night at their house until she was able to go to a transition house. Through their connections, newcomers are able to provide and fill in the gaps for one another that professional service providers may not be able to.

Community connections prevent other risk factors for families. Newcomers report that through making new friends, they develop their confidence in engaging in activities. This desire to come to programs and invite others as well, are due to the connections they build. In turn, these connections help root newcomers' identities to their community.

### **Response**

Newcomers are keen on making new connections and maintaining the connections they develop through Little Mountain. Although staff provides programming opportunities for newcomers to build community connections through community kitchen, food skills, events, and LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) outings, more can be done to connect different people together and strengthen new connections.

Staff can continue to foster relationships amongst newcomers so people are able to connect with their peers and find community. This can be done through an event like 'Homecoming' where newcomers come together every year to catch up and continue to stay in touch, or through an existing seasonal event, such as Winter Festival. Another way we can continue to do this includes having celebrations at the end of series workshops so that diverse group of people can get together. By providing more opportunities for people to connect and bond through food, art, or hobbies, we may be able to connect different groups of people (cultures, backgrounds, newcomers and locals) to build more diverse and enriching connections.

One small change that does not require a lot of support from staff to foster connections between newcomers and local residents is to have a community bulletin board where people can post what they need and/or can offer to the community. This is one way we continue to support and augment our existing programs.

## Steps Forward

Through this experience, we were able to discover the value in looking deeply into the impact we are having through our work with newcomers. This has given us some clear direction on what we can continue to strengthen and where we can improve. We have a lot of ideas, however, to start; we plan to implement the following recommendations:

1. We are committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. We are going to physically change the front of the building so newcomers feel more comfortable.
2. Building on the interactions staff and participants are already having, we will incorporate a regular staff meeting agenda item, "*Community Conversations*" where we will talk about how we can strengthen our existing practice to create a warm and welcoming space for everyone who walks through the door. This will help us be explicit and intentional with our work.
3. This process has helped us look at evaluations differently. We plan to continue the methodology of Project Impact by applying it to other programs and departments. We will continue to shift our evaluation based gathering methods while we build capacity and leadership within the organization.
4. We will continue to provide opportunities for newcomers to gather and to engage with other newcomers and residents in order for their voices to be heard and ideas implemented through informal English language exchange. For example, some newcomers are engaging with community gardens to learn about food systems and creating community.

## Appendix A: Identifying Indicators

### Impact #1 –

Newcomers have a sense of belonging at LMNH

**What we mean:** Settlement is a process. Newcomers regularly attend programs/share new experiences/have a space to build connections, find commonalities and appreciate differences.

#### E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers form significant relationships with others at the neighbourhood house - Do
- Newcomers are comfortable sharing their personal experiences - Feel
- Newcomers feel less anxiety engaging with newcomers and non-newcomers – Feel
- Newcomers learn and appreciate similarities and differences amongst their cohort – Know
- Newcomers regularly participate in programs at the neighbourhood house – Do

#### E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers are self-aware of their own settlement process - Become
- Newcomers grow attached to LMNHS as it is their home away from home - Love
- Newcomers believe they are needed and wanted at LMNHS

### Impact #2 –

Newcomers are experts in navigating community systems for themselves and others

**What we mean:** Newcomers know of community services, they are independently accessing services, and are able to advocate for themselves. A key indicator is confidence. It is a great achievement for newcomers to the country to learn new community systems. It is an integral part of their settlement process and builds on their skills to become peers mentors and support other newcomers.

#### E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers are aware of community systems – Know
- Newcomers are able to access resources for themselves – Do
- Newcomers feel confident in advocating for the services they need – Feel

#### E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers become advocates for themselves – Become
- Newcomers value the services they receive – Believe
- Newcomers persevere despite setbacks they encounter in their settlement journey – Love

## Appendix A: Identifying Indicators

### Impact #3 – Newcomers co-create their experiences

**What we mean:** Newcomers are not passive recipients of services, instead are active participants. Newcomers are co-authors of their experience. They are involved in 1 or more activities at LMNH

#### E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers increase participation in programs – Do
- Newcomers inquire about other programs and services – Know
- Newcomers identify their goals in their settlement process – Know
- Newcomers feel their voice is needed in the process – Feel
- Newcomers feel comfortable to be vulnerable when sharing their personal experiences – Feel

#### E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers are committed to their growth and development – Love
- Newcomers believe they can achieve their own goals – Believe
- Newcomers are collaborators in program development – Become

### Impact #4 –

Newcomers develop habits of civic engagement

**What we mean:** Newcomers know their rights and responsibilities. They actively contribute to their community. They know how to fit within different systems (such as voting, committees, volunteering).

#### E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers know their rights and responsibilities in Canada – Know
- Newcomers increase their involvement in civic engaging activities – Do
- Newcomers uphold their rights, responsibilities and freedoms – Do
- Newcomers are excited to contribute to their community – Feel

#### E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)

- Newcomers respect the principles of Canadian Society – Believe
- Newcomers love being active members of their community – Love
- Newcomers become active contributors to democratic processes – Become



# Little Mountain Neighbourhood House - Impact Survey

**We are conducting this survey with anyone that is or has been involved in the Settlement Program at LMNHS. We are interested in hearing from you any impacts/changes you've experienced as a result of your involvement.**

**Please take 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. Anyone completing the survey will be eligible for a draw to win a gift card**

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***Tell us to what extent you agree with the following***

1	Before coming to the neighbourhood house, I was aware of my rights in Canada					
2	Before coming to the neighbourhood house, I was aware of community resources					
3	Before coming to the neighbourhood house, I loved contributing to my community					
4	Before coming to the neighbourhood house, I was comfortable accessing resources					

***Now that you have been involved at LMNH tell us to what extent you agree with the following statements***

5	After coming to the neighbourhood house, I am more aware of my rights in Canada					
6	After working with the settlement workers at the neighbourhood house, I am more aware of community resources					
7	After coming to the neighbourhood house, I love contributing to my community					
8	After coming to the neighbourhood house, I am more comfortable accessing resources					

***Tell us to what extent you agree with the following statements***

9	As a result of coming to the neighbourhood house, I ask about other programs and services more often					
10	Since coming to the neighbourhood house, I participate in programs more frequently					

11	Because of Little Mountain Neighbourhood House, I have increased participation in my community				
12	As a result of participating at Little Mountain, I now feel confident in asking for what I need				
13	Since coming to the neighbourhood house, I am more comfortable sharing my experience(s) with others				
14	Since coming to Little Mountain, I am more appreciative of diversity				
15	As a result of being heard by my settlement worker, I am more confident in speaking up in the community				

*Please check yes or no for the following statements and provide examples if applicable*

		<b>Examples</b>		
16	Because of participating at Little Mountain, I am involved in civic engagement activities? (voting, volunteering, committees)			
17	As a result of coming to Little Mountain, I can find more things in common with other newcomers			
18	As a result of coming to the neighbourhood house, I stand up for my rights/responsibilities in Canada			
19	I have made friends through the neighbourhood house			# of friends: _____

**THANK YOU**

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

**Preamble:** *We are looking at people's experiences in settlement services. We wanted to ask you about your experience. We are interviewing approximately 24 people from all language groups at LMNHS. Most people we interview have taken part in NH programs for over a year. This will be a 45 min - 1 hour long interview. All of the information you provide is confidential. Information recorded will not include names, immigration status or any other personal identifiers. We will also have a report at the end of this project that you can have access to. At the end of the interview, (or at a later date?) we may also ask you to fill out a 10 min survey as well.*

What programs do you participate in at the NH? What new relationships have you developed?

What services are you now aware of that you weren't before coming to the NH? What is still really hard to figure out? In what ways has your trust in these service grown as a result of this experience?

What challenges have frustrated you through your settlement journey? How have you been learning to persevere through setbacks you encounter? ...As a result of your time at the neighbourhood house, in what ways are you standing up for yourself better than before?

What do you do now as a result of the NH?

How have the stories of others inspired (energized) you? How does this motivate you to keep moving forward (in your own settlement)?

What has been your greatest achievements as a result of participating in NH programs? What challenges to participating do you still struggle with? How are you a part of this process? (from *In what ways do you need to grow to be a collaborator in your settlement process?*)

What aspects mean the most to you when contributing back to the neighbourhood house? How has this changed the way you see yourself as part of the NH? As part of the community?

What have you learned at LM that has been useful for you in reaching your goals? How has this changed your mindset and what you believe about your future here?

What excites you about coming to LMNHS and about being part of this community? What frustrates you about being part of this community? In what ways has this helped you embrace your new life in Canada?

What have you learned from the NH about the values of Canada? How have your assumptions about Canada shifted or developed since being at the neighbourhood house?

How has your settlement journey evolved since coming to the NH? How has the NH shaped your settled experience to this point)?

Looking ahead 3-5 years, what does your/your family's ideal life in Canada look like?



## Appendix D: Theory of Change

Critical features of your program, initiative, or strategies	The theory or principle behind the feature of your approach
1. Client-centered personalized approach with one-to-one services	1. Staff can listen to what newcomers are experiencing their lives and respond to unique needs accordingly. Services are holistic and in the best interest of the client.
2. Services provided in client's mother tongue	2. Newcomers feel welcome and comfortable to fully and deeply express themselves in their own language. It is important for newcomers to feel like they are welcome anytime to a place and people that fully understand them Services provided in clients first linguist code gives them some sense of familiarity, safety and comfort. Staff can relate to experiences through the different stages of the newcomers/settlement process.
3. Continuity of relationship (attachment theory)	3. When people have a place to return, they feel more comfortable in sharing. Via continuity of relationship, clients know that the door is open for them, and that the organization cares for them We are planting a seed of belonging through the continuity of relationship.
4. Intentional intercultural group exchanges	4. The exchange between different groups deepens understanding, acceptance and diversity in Canada.
5. Multilingual group sessions share collaborative learning. This means appreciating what participants already know and encouraging people to share their experiences	5. When people engage and reflect on conversations on Canadian Freedoms, Rights and Responsibilities, they are able to connect larger ideas to their lived realities.
6. Using a grassroots approach staff are adaptable and flexible	6. This builds trust and comfort which is an essential part of relationship building.
7. Participant contribution through a strength based approach	7. People have skills, expertise and knowledge to solve their problems. Everyone has something to give and newcomers are agents of change for themselves rather than passive recipients.

### What additional principles do you hold which might not yet show up in your programs?

Reciprocal relation	Sense of mutual respect with 2 way learning
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