

Theory of Change

Low German Speaking newcomers are more likely to settle well and become healthy, engaged citizens if they are provided same language support and encouragement as they learn to navigate life in Canada.



Mennonite
Central
Committee

Measuring the Impact of Opening Doors: The Social Value of Settlement Services

Introduction

Settling into life in a new country and culture is never a simple process. Newcomers must often learn a new language; learn new rules of government and of daily life. Some of the rules one must learn are legally required, such as acquiring a driver's license and sending one's children to school for 10 months of the year. Other sets of rules include the social norms by which the dominant culture conducts itself when interacting with others and with the community at large.

Social Return on Investment Results

Our work creates immeasurable social value for all of the people who participate in our activities. From paving the way for service providers to make meaningful connections with Low German Speaking newcomers to empowering clients to make more informed decisions about their health, education and legal concerns, every dollar invested into the Low German Program creates at least \$3.60 in social value over 5 years.

Value to clients – increased connection to community services and understanding of cultural expectations of life in Canada resulting in an increased ability to transition and settle successfully.

Value to service providers – increased ability to carry out one's work and increased confidence that recommendations are being carried out by clients as they have been directed.

Value to staff – sense of living out one's faith values as staff who support people in building safe and secure lives in Canada.

By providing Low German language assistance to Low German Speaking newcomers as they go through the process of applying for legal status in Canada and as they begin to learn the ropes of life in the Canadian culture, MCC Ontario's activities open doors for our clients to experience the myriad of benefits that life in Canada has to offer.

What does it mean to settle well?

Helping newcomers settle well into life in Canada can lead to healthier, more actively engaged neighbours and friends who participate in community, achieve better employment outcomes, are more civically engaged and more likely to use the public resources that help all of us to lead healthier lives over the long term.¹

Achieving legal status is one of many steps to settling well in a new country. After receiving one's landed immigrant papers or citizenship card, people often feel more safe and secure in their new life. As a result, newcomers are more likely to ensure their children participate in our public school system and to acquire legal employment.



MCC Ontario's Low German Program aims to assist Low German Speaking Newcomers to settle well as they adjust to life in Canada, learn to speak English, apply for legal status and access the public services available to us all.



Though achieving legal status is an important part of the process, settling well means so much more. It also means that newcomers have achieved employment that provides an income with which one can support one's family.

To have settled well means that newcomers understand the cultural norms present in Canadian culture and are able to engage within these

MCC Ontario's services for Low German Speaking newcomers open doors that many of our clients don't even know exist before coming to our Chatham office. By providing settlement support in the Low German language, staff at the Chatham office are able to make our clients aware of the many differences between Canadian and Low German culture. Being aware of these differences themselves also means that staff are patient and compassionate as our clients learn to navigate the myriad of services and changes that life in Canada has to offer.

Between April 2011 and March 2012, MCC Ontario staff provided settlement services to the almost 160 people who applied for permanent residency or Canadian citizenship through the Chatham office. Applying for legal status in Canada is a complicated, time consuming and expensive process. MCC Ontario can cut down on the frustration, time and expense by putting our more than 30 years of experience to work to ensure our clients have all of their paper work in order before they file their applications. The team at the Chatham office interpret official documents and instructions from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure our clients are aware of the process and the important details that, if missed, can drag out an application for months and even years.

Our Building Healthy Babies (BHB) program offers Mothers and their children an opportunity to learn about better parenting practices and Canadian expectations of parents and families. These twice monthly sessions often include a presentation by the local Public Health staff, with interpretation provided by MCC Ontario staff, and cover a range of topics from proper sun protection for one's children and the benefits of non-toxic cleaning products to what to expect when one delivers a baby in a Canadian hospital.

BHB is also an opportunity for women to connect with other women and build stronger social connections in the community. Many of our clients are often isolated in rural areas with no means of transportation. These events help to rebuild a sense of community among the Low German

norms. It also means that our newcomers have a clear understanding of the formal laws by which one must abide in our country.

Furthermore, settling well means that newcomers are connected to our public services; it means that they regularly attend appointments with health care professionals and that their children are attending school. It also means that they are confident to actually use our community resources and services when needed.

Finally, settling well means that one has the skills and confidence necessary to create the life of their choosing within their new country and that they have the tools they need to make that life happen.

“ I didn't go to the doctor for the first 6 months of my pregnancy because I was afraid. Now we can have peace that everything is normal with the baby. -Soon to be Mom

Speaking people in the area.

Staff who work in the Low German Program also provide interpretation services for a number of different activities. Our staff provide support and interpretation as people attend doctor's appointments and meet with teachers and social workers. Interpretation is critical for our clients as they come from an oral culture and written material in any language is problematic.

Clients may also ask for assistance in translating important mail, in applying for tax benefits and in filing other government documents. Staff have attended appointments with optometrists and dentists and have even provided interpretation services in hospital during the long process of birthing a child.

Our status as trusted community advisors means that our clients come to us for assistance in navigating investigations through Family and Children Services and in developing workable education plans with teachers and educational assistants.

The Low German Program also liaises with public service providers to raise awareness of cultural differences and to build compassion and patience for people as they adjust to life in Canada. Our staff provide information about the population that challenges the stereotypes and false assumptions made by those who may not be aware of or understand the Low German culture in order to transform the way service providers approach Low German Speaking people.

Finally, the Chatham office connects people to jobs. People of the Low German Mennonite Culture share an aptitude for agriculture—a skill that is often in short supply in southern Ontario. Though funding for its employment services has recently ended, MCC Ontario continues to run a job board for employers who are looking for agricultural labourers, both seasonal and year round.

Participant Profile

From April 2011 to March 2012, MCC Ontario's Chatham and Leamington offices served at least 250 clients. 158 of our clients were newcomers who requested assistance in applying for legal status in Canada. During this same year, 40 of the families who utilised our services had already gained their citizenship papers. Finally, 48 of our clients were Mothers with young children who participated in the Building Healthy Babies activities. 28 of these women made use of the interpretation services available through the Chatham office.

Though no two clients are alike, the Low German Speaking men and women who come to MCC Ontario for assistance share a number of similarities. Almost all of our clients have at least one family member who is applying for legal status in Canada—either to become a landed immigrant or Canadian Citizen. Some have a legal claim to citizenship because a parent or grandparent was born in Canada. Others are married to or are children of Canadian citizens and are hoping to gain the security that ensures their family being together, building a life in Canada by attaining legal status for the whole family.

Our clients are hardworking people. They value family; they value community; they value the self-sufficient lifestyle that their people have embraced for generations. Each family has its own reasons for

immigrating to Canada. There are however a number of common elements in each family's story: they want to improve their financial opportunities and they are often looking to escape escalating violence in their home country.

Our clients live in rural areas and, because of distance, lack of transportation and few opportunities to connect with other community members, are often isolated from the communities in which they live. Many people have family members scattered across the province, but without a driver's license or the money for a car or phone bills, it is difficult to maintain connections and even to get out into the community.

Furthermore, many of our clients have young and growing families. Parents are looking for opportunities to put down roots as they raise their young children, find consistent, well-paid work and become part of the larger Low German Speaking community in Southern Ontario. Finally, many of our clients, though highly employable in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, are often not literate in English or Low German. As such, they find it difficult to find regular, well-paid work and are often scrambling to make ends meet.

The Social Value of Opening Doors

Assisting people to settle well into life in Canada creates substantial social value for our communities, for local service providers, for staff and for the people we serve.

By far, the most important outcome of the services provided by MCC Ontario's Chatham office is to bring about the opportunity for people to feel secure in their life in Canada. Once a family has gained legal status and found employment they are more likely to feel that Canada is home and that they are eligible to take advantage of all that life in Canada has to offer.

Surveys and one-on-one interviews with MCC Ontario's clients revealed that the activities of the Chatham office increase people's confidence and self-esteem as they learn to navigate Canadian life. Interpretation services also serve as another avenue where people engage with the English language and slowly learn how to speak with doctors, social workers and other professionals.

Interpreting for clients ensures that they are able to communicate well with service providers. This means that our clients can be confident that they are being understood and that they understand, which results in one being empowered to make more informed decisions about their health, education and family life.

Our clients also inform us that they feel more likely to send their children to school beyond the legal requirement as they gain an understanding of why a high school education is such an important part of a promising future in Canada.

Mothers report that they are more aware of best parenting practices. These parents also report that their children are happier and healthier as

they implement the knowledge they acquire through BHB. Women who participate in BHB report feeling less isolated within their community.

Furthermore, we offer our services free of charge which results in large costs savings for our clients—money which can be spent on ensuring healthy food and safe shelter as our clients settle into life in Canada.

The Low German program creates value for service providers, such as teachers, health care practitioners and social workers. They report an increased ability to carry out their mandate with Low German Speaking people who often have very little understanding of the English language or of the public services available that most of us take advantage of every day. These same service providers also report increased compassion and understanding for their Low German Speaking clients and increased confidence that they are being clearly understood.

Interviews with service providers also suggest that, because of our many years of experience, our assistance with applications for legal status cuts down on the time an application takes to process which can lead to more efficient services.

Finally, value is experienced by our staff who report a sense of pride in their work and an ability to put their values into action in the work they do every day. Staff members, all of whom speak Low German, report an increased sense of connection to other Low German communities across the province and an increased understanding of the ins and outs of settlement issues in Canada and beyond.

What's Different about Low German Speaking Mennonites?

The experience of Low German Speaking Mennonites is very different from the experience of other newcomers groups; their experience is also very different from that of people who have been born and raised in the Canadian culture.

Low German Speaking Mennonites grow up in an oral tradition and speak a language that, historically, has not been accessible in written form. Families teach their children to mind the home, to work on the farm and to participate in colony life through one on one participatory instruction rather than through written manuals and classroom training. As a result, this group, though skilled in their trade, often struggle with literacy issues both in their own language and in English. Nor do they have professional certification for the wide variety of skills that they possess.

Low German Speaking people in Latin America grow up with a self-sufficient, agrarian lifestyle that is not often seen in Canada. People sew their own clothes, grow their own food, repair their own machinery and teach their children to continue on in the same self-sufficient life. Even leisure time is spent in productive activity. People may get together to fix a neighbour's car or prepare food for a community meal, but taking time to sit and relax may only happen on Sunday afternoons.

Colony life is just one more difference to add to the list. Low German Speaking people in Latin America often live in small remote village colonies where everybody is known and life is a semi-communal activity carried out day by day. Families certainly have their own homes, farms and even businesses but work together to ensure the survival of their communities.

Communities are also very careful in adapting new technology. For example, some communities may have decided that it is acceptable to

drive cars and own cell phones, while other communities may continue to avoid the complications of modern life and continue to use horse and buggy as their main mode of transportation.

Many other immigrant populations have arrived in blocks and have gone through the settlement process as a group. The Low German population, on the other hand, has arrived over time which means that no two families are going through the process together. Furthermore, support within the community is often unavailable because earlier arrivals are typically still working towards settlement and financial stability themselves.

Often times, newcomers move to urban centers and suburban communities. Low German Speaking newcomers, on the other hand, most often chose to settle in rural areas where jobs are available in the agricultural sector. Rural areas are also attractive because there is less traffic on the roads, housing can accommodate large families and families can live as a cooperative unit without calling to much attention to their way of life.

Given the very different experience newcomers have had in their home country, they are unfamiliar with the types of resources available to people who live in Canada. It takes time for them to understand that these services are intended to build them up and that they are beneficial to their families. It takes even more time to integrate this belief into their daily life.

All of these factors contribute to the unique nature of Low German settlement in Ontario and beyond. The differences between Low German and Canadian culture as well as the differences between Low German Speakers and other newcomer groups means that we need to pay special attention to the unique needs of our Low German brothers and sisters as they work to settle well into life in Canada.

Conclusion

Every dollar invested into breaking down the unique barriers that bar Low German Speaking newcomers from adjusting well to life in Canada results in at least \$3.60 in social value for our clients, for our partners and for our staff.

By far the most important piece of our work is to provide Low German language support and interpretation for our clients as they apply for legal status, attend appointments with health care and education professionals and complete the paperwork necessary for all of the documentation one requires to prove they are Canadian.

Settling well into another culture means so much more than simply holding the proper documentation; it means understanding cultural norms and written laws. It means connecting to the public services that are available and feeling confident enough to use them. It means finding quality housing and transportation and engaging with the community around you.

MCC Ontario's Chatham office actively engages Low German Speaking newcomers in the process of settling well, which often leads to healthier citizens, happier families and more engaged neighbours and friends. Our services also lead to an increased ability for public service providers to carry out their mandate and allow our staff an avenue to put their values into action every day. And, to top it all off, our clients report an increased sense of overall well-being as they make the adjustment from colony life to life in Canada.

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