



Annual Report

2019-2020

Vision

Building Community Together

Mission

To support people by providing coordinated services to navigate a successful path, by collaborating with community partners and stakeholders.

Locations

Altona – 67 2nd St. NE, 204-324-6858

Dauphin – 37 3rd Ave NW, 204-647-0693

Morden – 34 Stephen St., 204-822-4387

Winkler – 295 Perry St., 204-325-4059

Find Us Online

www.regionalconnections.ca

www.facebook.com/regionalconnections

www.instagram.com/regionalconnections



Regional Connections Staff

Steve Reynolds, Executive Director

Olesja Kraft, Settlement and Employment Coordinator

- 8 Settlement Workers
- 5 SWIS (Settlement Workers In Schools)
- 2 Employment Facilitators

Rhoda Keck, Language Program Director

- **Jaime Friesen-Pankratz** – Head Teacher
- **Giselle Limaya Brito** – Learning Coach
- 23 Instructors

Diane Toews, Childcare Coordinator

- 9 Childcare Workers

Alesha Hildebrand, Volunteer and Integration Coordinator

- 1 Integration Worker

Elaine Burton Saindon, PVLIP Coordinator

Jessica Lopez, Lead Administrative Assistant

- 3 Receptionists



Board of Directors

Board Chair – Loren Braul, Gilmour & Braul Law Office

Vice Chair – Char Klassen, Southern Health-Sante Sud RHA

Secretary – Cyndy Kutzner, Western School Division

Treasurer – Eugen Klassen, Elias Woodwork

Board Member – Don Wiebe, Rhineland Municipality

Board Member – Marvin Plett, City of Winkler

Board Member – Todd Monster, Garden Valley School Division

Board Member – Deepak Saini, Diamond Doors

Board Member – Shelly Voth, Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative

Core Funders

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

- Settlement, Employment, Language, Childcare, and Integration Services
- Local Immigration Partnership

Manitoba Immigration and Economic Opportunities (IEO)

- Settlement and Integration

Manitoba Industry, Training, and Employment Services (ITES)

- Employment

Manitoba Adult Language and Learning (ALL)

- Literacy

Executive Director's Report

Submitted by: Steve Reynolds, Executive Director

2019-20 was another great year at Regional Connections, I would like to thank our terrific staff, who are knowledgeable and passionate about the work they do. Any success we achieve is owed in large part to their hard work as we served over 4,500 clients through our various programs and activities.

This year Regional Connections was the recipient of the 2020 Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce's Non-Profit of the Year Award. This award is an important recognition of the history of excellence at Regional Connections and it shows local acknowledgment of the importance of our services to the community. Congratulations to all!

This year, Altona and Rhineland were selected to be 1 of 11 national pilot sites for IRCC's new Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP). This pilot is an important model that looks to increase local-level participation in the immigration process by giving local stakeholders a role in endorsing immigration applicants to the community. Regional Connections was engaged in this process from the start and looks forward to the impact of the project on Altona/Rhineland. While RNIP was launching, we were also busy supporting and partnering with the Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative (MCDII), which welcomed twice the typical number of newcomer families to Morden, including over 100 families just through summer 2019. Winkler has also been working on a partnership with the province to recruit newcomers to the city to help meet local employment needs.

Regional Connections was 1 of 7 provincial service providers selected by Immigration and Economic Opportunities (IEO) Manitoba to provide Manitoba-funded settlement services for IRCC-ineligible clients, including temporary foreign workers and Canadian citizens with settlement needs such as Low German Mennonites. After several years of advocating for this service gap, we were happy to see the province step up with new funding that allowed us to serve 956 "Manitoba clients" in 10 months through this program. All local residents are now able to come to Regional Connections for Settlement Program supports, regardless of immigration status.

2019 was also another year for a building project at Regional Connections. We successfully fundraised and completed a 1,680 sq ft addition to our Winkler office, which includes a new home for the Childcare Program and three additional staff offices.

We worked throughout the year on a major Call For Proposals (CFP) from IRCC for a first-time-ever 5 year funding cycle for 2020-25. Regional Connections submitted a proposal and successfully negotiated for expanded services effective April 1, 2020 including a new service site in Dauphin, increased mental health supports, and several new staff positions. We look forward to moving ahead under the added stability of a 5-year agreement.

As we all know, the 2019-20 fiscal year ended with the emergence of COVID-19. I commend our staff for their professional response and their adaptability while we were continually reassessing and adapting to find ways to meet client needs while complying with provincial health regulations. Language classes and group programming moved immediately online and we did our best to become webinar experts overnight. At present, we continue to provide these modified services, with many staff working from home, while also being attentive to clients who have language, digital, or economic barriers that prevent them from accessing online services.

Settlement Program Report

Submitted by: Olesja Kraft, Settlement and Employment Coordinator

Our Settlement Workers welcome each newcomer client to Regional Connections with a settlement intake and personalized settlement plan. This informs additional services provided, including information and orientation for life in Canada, interpretation, and referrals to internal and external services. Our work as a team gives the diverse populations we serve the best possible settlement experience through one-on-one, family, and group-based program delivery. The past year was a busy and exciting one for us as we served over 3,500 Settlement clients. Regional Connections was able to add 2 more Settlement Workers to our great team last year, as settlement services were expanded through new Manitoba funding to support all clients, regardless of immigration status.

Highlights of the Regional Connections Settlement Program in 2019-2020

- Clients who received a Settlement needs assessment: 2,276
- The top 10 countries of origin were: Philippines, Kazakhstan, Germany, Ukraine, Russia, India, Mexico, Paraguay, Syria, Brazil
- The top 10 languages spoken by our clients were: Tagalog, Low German, Russian, German, English, Ukrainian, Punjabi, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese

The language barrier is a challenge to successful settlement for many newcomers. With the help of our staff and volunteers, including certified Community Interpreters, our translation and interpretation team provides crucial assistance to bridge the language gap, not only to clients in all units of the organization but also to our community partners.



SWIS Program

Our Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) program partners with Western School Division and Border Land School Division to support the orientation and onboarding of newcomer students so that they can fully participate and succeed in school life. We also support the parents, families, and school staff to ensure there is good communication, engagement, and participation between the home and schools so that newcomer children and youth have the best possible school outcomes. SWIS worked with over 1,000 clients this past year.

Each SWIS program is unique, but our staff can be involved from the initial registration and school orientation (school tours) through to supporting kids and youth in noon-hour and after school programming, summer programming, and by liaising between the student, home, and school to support all involved. Cultural differences and language barriers can prevent newcomers from fully participating and fully succeeding in Canadian schools, so our SWIS staff work hard to bridge these gaps by making connections, supporting communication, and promoting participation.

Information sessions for families on High School Course Selection nights, Student Led Conferences, and the Manitoba School System help families better understand schools so they can participate and support their kids. Interpretation and translation supports ensure good communication. Connections to community programs and resources also help address barriers so more newcomer kids are able to participate in sports, day camps, etc.



Employment Program Report

Submitted by: Olesja Kraft, Settlement and Employment Coordinator

Fiscal 2019-20 was a busy year for our two Employment Facilitators, welcoming newcomers and Canadian-born clients, helping them prepare for and find suitable employment, and helping them to succeed in the Pembina Valley workforce. We also worked closely with our employers and involved them in assisting our clients to become job-ready and employed through resume writing, interview skills and job readiness sessions.

Client Satisfaction

Almost all of our clients and most employer partners reported being satisfied with the quality of the services we provided. In most cases we either achieved or exceeded our goals, indicating that the demand for our services is growing. And not only were our programs in demand, they were also effective. According to the results of last year's client evaluations of our programs, most respondents feel an improvement in their self-awareness and confidence regarding employment. A great majority report having acquired increased knowledge in relevant subject areas, such as workers' rights and responsibilities and Canadian workplace culture; a majority also feel that they have acquired or improved various job-readiness skills such as networking, resume writing, and interviewing. Long-term results show that half of our clients in relevant programs become employed or self-employed within the first year of working with us.

Our Employment staff served 506 unique clients in 2019-2020, only 10% of clients left the program still looking for work. The rest were employed, continuing with other services, continuing in education or training, etc.

