



Annual Report

2020-2021

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 – 30 1st Ave NE, 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.facebook.com/regionalconnectionsdauphin

www.instagram.com/regionalconnections



Steve Reynolds, Executive Director

Olesja Kraft, Settlement Coordinator

- 9 Settlement Workers

Adeleke Dada, Employment Coordinator

- 2 Employment Facilitators
- 1 Project Liaison (MALTI)

Rhoda Keck, Language Program Director

- 1 Head Teacher
- 1 Learning Coach
- 3 Placement Test Assessors
- 20 Instructors

Allan Jones, SWIS Coordinator

- 8 SWIS Workers

Alesha Hildebrand, HIPPY Coordinator

- 2 Home Visitors

Natalie MacFarlane, Childcare Coordinator

- 9 Childcare Workers

Elaine Burton Saindon, PVLIP Coordinator

- 1 Program Support Worker

Deborah Slonowsky, DAWCC Coordinator & Dauphin Regional Site Manager

- 2 Settlement Workers
- 1 SWIS Worker

Robyn Wiebe, Volunteer Facilitator

Diana Suderman, Mental Health Counsellor

Russelle Collantes, 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 – Shelly Voth, Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative

Treasurer – Deepak Saini, Diamond Doors

Board Member – Don Wiebe, Rhineland Municipality

Board Member – Michael Grenier, City of Winkler

Board Member – Marianne Fenn, Western School Division

Board Member – Eugen Klassen, Elias Woodworking

Core Funders

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

- Settlement, Employment, Language, SWIS, HIPPY, Childcare
- Local Immigration Partnerships

Manitoba Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration

- Settlement and Integration
- Adult Literacy

Manitoba Economic Development & Jobs

- Employment Facilitators
- MALTI

Executive Director's Report

Submitted by: Steve Reynolds, Executive Director

2020-21 was a successful but very challenging year at Regional Connections due to the pandemic. I would like to thank our terrific staff, who are knowledgeable and passionate about the work they do and who have also been flexible and client-focused throughout this year. Any success we achieve is owed in large part to their hard work as we served over 4,000 clients through our various programs and activities during a very challenging time.

The past program year started in April 2020 with the arrival of COVID in Manitoba, which had an immediate impact on our work. Throughout the year, Regional Connections adjusted and adapted to changing conditions, working throughout to stay focused on supporting clients and collaborating with partners, as we always aim to do, to best meet emerging and changing needs.

As a multi-site agency, we had a head start in terms of familiarity with some tools and resources like Teams and Zoom, but we still had a lot of learning to do to shift our service delivery on the fly and still be available for clients while providing the best services possible. Staff became webinar host experts, figured out the best ways to use Teams, hosted conference and video calls, and generally did whatever was necessary to keep doing their work, whether in the office or from home.

As COVID continued in the broader community and around the world, we also had our own planned and significant changes to work through within the organization. Regional Connections welcomed staff to the new Dauphin site (previously Dauphin and Region Immigrant Services), which meant onboarding a new team to the organization but also adding staff to the team and moving to a new site, as we were able to renovate and relocate the Dauphin office to a central, visible 2,000 sq ft standalone office that can better meet local client needs by providing Settlement, SWIS, Language, and LIP services.

Fall 2020 was also time to roll out several new or expanded programs, including HIPPY (Home Instruction to Parents of Preschool Youngsters), additional SWIS staff for 2 new school division partnerships, the Professional Skills Bridging Program, and a second LIP (Local Immigration Partnership) – the Dauphin and Area Welcoming Communities Coalition. These new programs and increased staff capacity have helped us to better meet client and community needs from a more holistic perspective, supporting newcomer parents, families, children and youth, internationally educated professionals, and better facilitating coordination between community stakeholders and partners.

In January 2021, Regional Connections became a project partner for a prairie region initiative to better support seasonal and temporary workers in agriculture and food processing, particularly those impacted by COVID, called TFW Hub. This partnership with 10 other settlement service providers from across MB, SK, and AB helped us build stronger relationships, through proactive settlement outreach work, with employers and seasonal workers across the Pembina Valley and Parkland regions. This proactive, collaborative approach to services presents a promising model for future efforts (<https://tfwhub.ca/>).

Thank you also to our board of directors for continuing to support the work of Regional Connections, as well the many excellent community partners, collaborators, and volunteers. We're continuing to work at Building Community Together.

Settlement Program Report

Submitted by: Olesja Kraft, Settlement 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 provided over 8,000 settlement services to clients

Highlights of the Regional Connections Settlement Program in 2020-2021

- 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

This year presented a few challenges due to COVID-19, its impact on immigration and settlement, and the way we serve our clients. While we continued to offer in person services, Settlement Workers also found ways to meet the needs of our clients remotely, with much of our work moving online and over the phone. Information sessions were presented via Zoom, which enabled us to answer many of the questions our clients had regarding COVID, government initiatives, and other settlement issues. With the help of our staff, our clients continued to be connected with community partners ensuring needs were being met, and that there was minimal disruption to their settlement plans.



SWIS Program Report

Submitted by: Allan Jones, SWIS Coordinator

The Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) program works in collaboration with the following school divisions: Border Land, Garden Valley, Mountain View and Western. Throughout the region there are 8 SWIS workers and our new SWIS Co-ordinator, Allan Jones, who joined Regional Connections in January. Allan comes to us with many years of experience as a teacher and administrator in the Manitoba public school system.

The goal of the SWIS Program is to support the enrollment and orientation 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 and community experience.

Statistical highlights:

- Number of children: 271
- Number of countries represented: 19, comprised from countries in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

A few highlights of the past year:

- Bringing Garden Valley School Division (Winkler) and Mountain View School Division (Dauphin) on board as new SWIS programs
- Starting the Youth Mentor Program in Altona (6 mentors have been trained and matched with 6 newcomer mentees)
- Partnering with community Family Resource Centres
- Still finding success with clients while working within COVID restrictions. This includes but is not limited to planning activities for the children through on-line platforms. Some of the activities have been collaborated on regionally as supplies are sent to or purchased by each community then children join a common on-line presentation.
- Review and development of some forms for consistency across the region. In particular, we have been working on: SWIS Program Overview, SWIS Intake, Exchange of Information, SCORE Planning, School system yearly plan and SWIS Team goal setting.



Employment Program Report

Submitted by: Adeleke Dada, Employment Coordinator

Fiscal 2020-21 was a busy year for the Employment Program, as it adapted to a blend of in-person and online services to newcomers and Canadian-born clients in the region. Two staff positions were added to the Employment Program team: An Employment Coordinator and MALTI Project Liaison, creating a growth opportunity for the program. The Project Liaison gives more tailored services to Internationally Educated Professionals who face multiple barriers in launching their careers in our community while the Employment Coordinators' primary role is to build relationships and partnerships with businesses and hiring managers in our community, and coordinate the Employment Program activities.

A program highlight was hosting our first online job fair in collaboration with employers in our community. We also connected with 67 employers within the calendar year, which is a starting point to our goal of being closely connected to all employers in our communities. The Professional Skills Bridging project (MALTI) had over 64 Internationally Educated Professional clients registered and 12 in our mentorship program within the period. We also have 10 clients in the process of getting licensed to practice in regulated professions. We are excited about the progress being made by newcomers in their paths to licensing.

Success Stories (shared with permission)

Reynaldo Valenzuela wanted to study to become an Accounting and Payroll Administrator and needed financial assistance for his study. He was referred to the Project Liaison at Regional Connections, where he learned that there is no need for him to start the lengthy credentials recognition process because his profession is not regulated. He was advised that he needs a certificate or diploma from a local educational institution. A language assessment was completed, and Reynaldo was able enroll in classes.

This is what Reynaldo said: “The Project Liaison assisted with the proper channel for my credential recognition and the steps to conduct my assessment. He also provided recommendations that helped me with the process”.

Reynaldo has received 50% financial support for his education. He started his Accounting and Payroll Administrator one-year diploma program on May 25th, 2021.



Language Program Report

Submitted by: Rhoda Keck, Language Program Director

June marks the end of a challenging, yet rewarding, 12 months of language classes! We would like to congratulate our staff and students who showed great flexibility and resiliency in their language learning efforts this year. To the teachers we say thank you for your dedication and creativity in ensuring that the language needs of your students were being met.

Here are some statistical highlights from the Language Program this year (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021):

- 618 unique clients attended classes at Regional Connections
 - 714 total registrations
 - LINC: 400
 - English for Work (at Regional Connections): 172
 - English at Work (in the workplace): 21
 - Literacy: 121
 - Clients attended classes in:
 - Winkler: 424
 - Morden: 131
 - Altona: 96
 - Dauphin & Morris: 38
 - Provincial Online Clients: 25
- 144 CLB class placement tests for new clients

Program Highlights

- Dauphin: This past year we were able to provide language classes for many of our clients in Dauphin, through our online learning platform, Avenue. Many of these students have been waiting for the opportunity to access language training in order to reach their goal of attaining Canadian Citizenship.
- Provincial Online Classes: Due to the large number of newcomers on waitlists in Manitoba, IRCC opened a call to language providers in the province to apply for funding to provide online, province-wide LINC classes. Because Regional Connections has years of experience in online ESL instruction, we were one of four organizations in the province chosen to provide two of these online LINC classes.

Success Stories (shared with permission)

- Anna Friesen- Anna has a passion for learning and spreading the word about the importance of literacy! She first joined Regional Connections' Adult Literacy Program (ALP) in the fall of 2012 with the long-term goal of obtaining her high school diploma. In 2015, she took a break from her studies to pursue a career as a homecare aide and later returned to our ALP in 2019 to work toward her Stage 3 literacy certificate. Currently, Anna is in the process of completing Stage 3 and plans to go forward with her dream of getting her high school diploma. Meanwhile, she has also obtained a short-term position as a Family Literacy Facilitator here at Regional Connections. Each week Anna visits young mothers and their children to read with them, guide them in literacy games and activities, and expound the importance of early literacy skills.

- Yuliia Soloviova – Yuliia moved to Canada in January of 2020, from Ukraine, where she worked as a nurse. Upon moving to Morden, Yuliia began taking our IELTS classes, and then the English for Healthcare Workers class. The English for Healthcare Workers class was taught by a local practicing Laboratory Technician, who provided an opportunity for students to grow in their English language skills, as well as gain knowledge of the healthcare system in Manitoba, and provide opportunities to network with local healthcare professionals. This proved helpful to Yuliia, as she was able to gain employment at Tabor Home as a Healthcare Aide.



Childcare Program Report

Submitted by Natalie MacFarlane: Childcare Program Coordinator

This year we wished Diane Toews farewell. Diane coordinated the Childcare Program for the last ten years and we are very thankful for all that she has contributed to Regional Connections. In May of 2021, we welcomed Natalie MacFarlane as the new Childcare Program Coordinator. Natalie came to Regional Connections with extensive experience in Early Childhood Education and we are looking forward to having her coordinate the Childcare Program moving forward.

The Childcare Program allows clients with pre-school children to take daytime ESL and Literacy classes by offering free, on-site childcare for students. As newcomers to Canada themselves, many children have little or no English and are unfamiliar with the Canadian way of life. Our caring staff provide a warm and welcoming environment for the children and parents alike. The children learn through creative programming facilitated by our experienced staff. We set time aside to communicate personally with parents to ensure a smooth transition into childcare as well as an ongoing positive experience for both the child and parent.

Success story (shared with permission):

Kateryna Semenova moved to Canada with her husband 7 years ago. Upon arrival they became very familiar with Regional Connections, and all of the programs and classes that were available to them. They now have three children, and all three of her children have attended the Childcare Program offered out of the Winkler location. Her children first enrolled in the Childcare program in 2019, and they have been actively attending ever since. Kateryna spoke about her experience with the Childcare Program and how it has made an impact on her and her family in a positive way. "I like (everything) about the Childcare Program at Regional Connections--it really helps me because if Regional Connections didn't have this program I couldn't take classes and improve my English because I have to stay home with my three girls. This Childcare program makes it easy for me and for other moms to better our English and have time to focus on our course work. I appreciate all of the staff who work in the child care program every day because my children, they love it. They are learning English, and sometimes they speak English at home and I can't believe it, they are just three years old! We are so lucky to have this program, every day my children ask me if they are going to childcare today and they are excited to go. That makes me so happy." - Kateryna

Stats: Total Registrations: 79 children



Dauphin and Region Report

Submitted by: Deborah Slonowsky, Regional Program Manager & DAWCC Coordinator

On April 1, 2020, Dauphin became the fourth office and second region to be served by Regional Connections. As a result, 2020/21 has been a year of change, learning, and significant growth. Our services and staffing have expanded, our clients and staff have access to a wider array of programs, resources and expertise and, because of Regional Connection's eye-catching and professional branding and promotional material, our office has a more professional and recognizable presence in our region.

While the changes we experienced this year were immense, the transition to become a Regional Connections site was smooth as the model for a multi-site organization already existed. Through the use of technology (Zoom and Teams) our staff are well connected with colleagues, resources and learning opportunities. Similarly, technology has enabled our area's clients to participate in many online learning and group activities organized and delivered from the Pembina Valley.

Although in-person visits and meetings were difficult, Steve made several trips to the region when travel was possible and was accompanied by Adeleke (Employment) and Rhoda (Language.) These in-person visits with area clients, employers, partners and stakeholders were extremely beneficial to creating relationships and assuring community members that programming under Regional Connections remains responsive to local need.

Program Highlights:

- New Location - In January, our office moved from its former location within the Dauphin United Church into its own building in a highly visible location. The building has an accessibility ramp and ample parking and was renovated prior to move-in. We now have a professional and spacious site for our services, including 4 offices, a classroom and a flex room. Since our move, we have had new client drop-ins as people notice our sign from the street and have had several visits from former Pembina Valley residents who recognize the Regional Connections sign, speaking volumes for the power of brand and service recognition.
- Dauphin & Area Welcoming Communities Coalition (DAWCC,) a zonal immigration partnership-In October, IRCC confirmed funding to start a Zonal Immigration Partnership in Dauphin. DAWCC will serve the City of Dauphin and 7 surrounding rural municipalities. Because communications had taken place prior to funding, it was an easy step to establish a partnership council (currently 13 stakeholders) and an immigration advisory table. Work is underway to finalize the DAWCC logo and website and we are looking forward to a year of learning and growth.
- City of Dauphin Partnership - For the past two program years, the City of Dauphin has provided grant money to support local newcomer programming. In addition to the financial contribution, the City named Regional Connections within its Strategic Plan as a partner towards population growth. Our office also partners with the City to distribute the "Welcome to Dauphin" package. All material is collected and provided by city staff and our office distributes the packages using newcomer volunteers with good knowledge of the community. The partnership gives our office more exposure and provides settled newcomers with the opportunity to be community ambassadors as they welcome new residents to Dauphin.

HIPPY Report

Submitted by: Alesha Hildebrand, HIPPY Coordinator

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), empowers mothers as the primary educators of their children in the home, strengthens mother-child relationships and fosters mothers' involvement in school and community to maximize successful early school experiences. We do this by providing weekly home visits, with a strong emphasis on literacy and school readiness.

We began HIPPY in November 2020, and hired 2-part time home visitors, who share the language, culture, and life experiences of many of the families they serve. Their contribution to families within the community was recognized by the Mothers Matter Centre, as both were nominated for the Mother of the Year award!



Program Highlights:

- Number of families served: 20

HIPPY Story (shared with permission):

"I am Gisela from Chile, currently living in Canada for one year and four months. I'm enrolled in the HIPPY Program because my daughter is starting kindergarten this fall and we thought this would be a great program to get her set up for this new stage in her life. It's really heartwarming see how she enjoys the activities and learns in the process. She really enjoys books, numbers, colors, and motor activities. However, she is starting to enjoy Sciences and learn the alphabet, as well.

For every bilingual kid in the world, the process to adapt to a new language, country, and culture is a challenge, but I think this program and Regional Connections has been a real support for us as newcomers."



Volunteer Program Report

In fall of 2020, Robyn Wiebe became the new Volunteer Facilitator as Alesha Hildebrand moved to her new role as HIPPY Coordinator. Robyn was excited to pick up where Alesha left off and continue to engage and support volunteers at Regional Connections.

Volunteers continue to be critical to the work of Regional Connections. Some community cultural activities are highly visible, while at other times volunteers may be unseen but are equally important. While responding to changing pandemic conditions, volunteers were instrumental in helping our services be adaptable as we worked to ensure clients were not left behind or forgotten through new ways of doing things and particularly through the increased isolation everyone was experiencing.

Through the Volunteer Program, newcomers can volunteer at Regional Connections and are connected to various community volunteering opportunities. Many newcomers are looking to get involved, meet new people, and give back to the community. Also, Canadian-born community members can volunteer at Regional Connections to support services in our classrooms, one-on-one with clients, or in our community events.

Some highlights from volunteer areas of focus this year include:

- Language Buddies
 - One-on-one English conversation partners
 - Met in-person according to health orders or via video calls or phone calls
 - 35 volunteers were matched with 42 newcomer clients
- Community Professionals
 - Community professionals can volunteer to speak to groups of newcomers in Information and Orientation sessions, or they can be matched for one-on-one 'cup of coffee' meetings with Internationally Educated Professionals who would like to hear about working in their intended occupation locally and build their professional networks
 - 72 community professionals volunteered this past year
- Interpreters
 - Staff and volunteer interpreters are able to provide interpretation between English and 21 other languages. Interpretation helps improve accessibility to services for newcomers with lower English levels.
- Community Mentors
 - The Community Tour Guide role expanded and became more formalized as part of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in Altona/Rhineland to become Community Mentors. Community Mentors become a local contact for community orientation, welcome, and social connection during the first year after arrival. Community Mentors were matched 11 newcomers in the latter part of the year and the program is expanding to include other communities in Regional Connections' service area.

The Volunteer Program also helped support local events like the Morden Multicultural Winterfest and Southern Health's Healthy Communities Conference.

A big thank you to all our volunteers and community partners!



Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) Report

Submitted by: Elaine Burton Saindon, PVLIP Coordinator

This year, despite initial setbacks brought on with moving to virtual platforms, we saw an increased level of engagement by both PVLIP members, community members and organizations in our efforts to create welcoming and inclusive communities and increase a sense of belonging for newcomers throughout the Pembina Valley.

Some notable highlights from year one of our 5-year implementation phase included:

- Creating a series of newcomer videos stories
- Creating the Hear My Story book of newcomer experiences
- Hosted Part 2 of the Mental Health for Newcomers focus group
- Started a weekly newspaper column, Cultural Connections, in the South Central Post
- Created the 2021 Diversity Calendar
- Hosted a knowledge sharing fair, The Power of Referral Networks
- Developed a Welcoming & Inclusive Community Policy framework
- Hosted Managing a Multicultural Workplace diversity & intercultural workshop for employers and HR managers
- Conducted the first annual PVLIP Connecting Cultures & Communities Celebration

These main activities were supported by quarterly meeting with each of PVLIP's 5 main groups and sub-committees: the Local Partnership Council, Immigrant Advisory Table, Welcoming & Inclusive Community, Communication, and Mental Health working groups.

In total, 47 volunteer members (stakeholders, newcomers and community professionals) participate on one or more PVLIP council, working group or committee having contributed 408 hours of their knowledge, expertise and time in 2020-21.

Community engagement via Social Media dramatically increased to 33,260 over the previous year of 6 representing a 2000% increase. Followers increased 38% on Facebook and 56% on Instagram. The PVLIP Website had a 57% increase on home page views. These results were possible through the staff support position that started in 2020 and enabled PVLIP to significantly improve our visibility.



Thank you to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, the Province of Manitoba, and our other funders and contributors for helping to make this year a success!

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