



# Regional Connections

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

## AGM Report June 2022

**Vision: Building Community Together**

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



# Greetings!

At Regional Connections, our vision is 'Building Community Together.' We believe strongly in client-centred services and a coordinated response to welcoming newcomers to Canada.

This work starts within our organization with our board of directors, who represent a range communities, sectors, and professions from across our service area and help promote the engagement of Regional Connections in the communities where we live and work. We have three board members at the end of their final term and would like to thank them for their years of support, encouragement, expertise. Don Wiebe, Loren Braul, and Char Klassen have all helped guide Regional Connections through significant growth, many successes, and challenges. Thank you so much for your contributions!

Our staff team works in several programs including Settlement, Employment, Language, Community Connections, Support Services, and Local Immigration Partnerships. Working together to connect as coworkers, identify client needs, provide timely referrals, and partner with each other on service delivery means our clients will receive the best possible support within Regional Connections. It's an ongoing effort for our staff to stay in touch and work together to support clients – a huge thank you to each of you!



Winkler (2-295 Perry St)



Altona (Unit B 58 2nd Street NE)

Outside of Regional Connections, we have tremendous opportunities in our communities to work with other partners. The spirit of collaboration is alive and well in rural Manitoba. We know that working with community members, service providers, and stakeholders is a key component of Building Community Together.



Here are some of the local committees, projects, and working groups that we participated in and contributed to this past year:

Municipal immigration programs and partnerships:

- o Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative
- o Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot – Altona/Rhineland
- o Regional Immigration Strategy Working Group – Dauphin & Region
- o Churchill Community Immigration Initiative

Interagency teams of multiple service providers and stakeholders:

- o Winkler Resource Committee
- o Rhineland Interagency Team (RIAT)
- o Morden Interagency Committee
- o Parkland Practitioners Committee

Wrap-around service projects:

- o Community Cares Program at Central Station, Winkler
- o CommUNITY project housed at Border Land School Division, Altona

Settlement Workers In Schools partnerships with:

- o Border Land School Division
- o Garden Valley School Division
- o Mountain View School Division
- o Western School Division



Morden (34 Stephen St)



Dauphin (30 1st Avenue NE)

We're also a member and active partner in provincial and national networks and projects including the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO), the National Immigration Centre at the Conference Board of Canada, and many more. The settlement sector is a truly collaborative network with lots of support, shared expertise, advocacy, and opportunity to work together across the province and across the country.

I'd like to thank each of our staff for their excellent work again this year. We continued to adjust and be responsive to client needs and to be flexible during COVID. We've started new services and programs including the Gateway to Work Experience for Newcomers program, the Resettlement Assistance Program, Case Management, remote settlement support to newcomers in Churchill, and regular itinerant services to Carman (weekly) and Morris (bi-weekly). And near the end of the fiscal year, we saw the emergence of the conflict in Ukraine and have worked hard to support arriving families in coordination with a lot of community support and initiative. Everything truly works best for all of us when we're Building Community Together!

*Steve Reynolds*

Executive Director



# Settlement Program

Written by Olesja Schwabauer (Settlement Coordinator) & Tina Barkman (Settlement Director)

Settlement Services support newcomers (immigrants and refugees) settle and integrate into life in Canada. As front-line service providers, Settlement Workers help newcomers to successfully settle and integrate by providing needs assessments, helping clients set goals, providing referrals and information, and, as part of the team at Regional Connections, advocating for client needs. The multitude of changes newcomers experience after arriving in Canada can be overwhelming. It is our goal to provide the support, cultural understanding and tools needed not only to adjust to a new life in Canada but to thrive. Highlights of the Regional Connections Settlement Program between April 2021-March 2022

## The top 10 countries of origin:

1. Philippines;
2. Kazakhstan;
3. Germany;
4. Ukraine;
5. Russia;
6. India;
7. Mexico;
8. Paraguay;
9. Syria; and
10. Brazil.

## The top 10 languages spoken by our clients:

1. Tagalog
2. Low German
3. Russian
4. German
5. English
6. Ukrainian
7. Punjabi
8. Arabic
9. Spanish
10. Portuguese

At Regional Connections, we are always looking for opportunities to educate, inform and connect newcomers through programs rich in experiential learning for our clients and volunteers. This was demonstrated in our programming which included information sessions and community events:

1. MPI (driving in Manitoba)
2. Buying a home in Canada
3. Canadian Banking System (loans, credit cards, credit history)
4. Scams
5. Workers Compensation
6. Manitoba health
7. Human trafficking
8. Canada Revenue Agency information
9. Cancer care
10. Renting vs Owning a House
11. Tenant/House Insurance





- Weekly Wednesday conversation groups where a variety of speakers provided participants with important information on a number of topics (i.e. employment, banking, mental health etc.)
- We facilitated conversation groups for men, women, and seniors as well as on subjects of interest like how to garden and can produce in Manitoba.
- We prepared clients for their citizenship test by having volunteer-led Citizenship classes.

This year we were able to expand our outreach to many farm and food processing workers who are in Canada on temporary work permits and who often, due to work schedules and being the only family member in Canada, are not able to access Settlement Services during regular office hours. This outreach project resulted in:

- 257 new TFW (temporary foreign worker) intakes
- Distributed over a hundred welcome bags with information, resources, and COVID-related PPE
- Because Seasonal Agricultural Workers tend to work extended hours (day, evening and night), we made information sessions available on the weekends
- We also reached out to over 250 employers in our region. We provided information about our outreach program and made sure everyone was made aware of the services Regional Connections can offer to new and existing temporary workers.
- 189 direct services were provided to TFW's.

Temporary foreign workers play a vital role in our local economy by helping employers fill jobs where Canadian or Permanent Residents are not available, and by bringing skills and expertise to companies seeking a competitive advantage.

We, at Regional Connections, are able to help newcomers in our region learn about and navigate our various Canadian systems (Canadian Health Care, MPI, WCB, Employment Standards, Revenue Canada, Human Rights, etc.). We work in groups, take individual appointments and set up information sessions to accommodate clients' needs.





# Success Stories

Written by Olesja Schwabauer (Settlement Coordinator)

## **Story #1: Citizenship for a Refugee Family of 11**

A couple, together with their nine children, arrived in Canada as refugees on August 11, 2016. The father applied for Canadian Citizenship for the entire family and they finally had their online interview on February 15, 2022 at the Regional Connections Altona office. The oldest daughter joined the interview from Alberta.

Three weeks later, on March 8, 2022, the family received Citizenship in an online ceremony! Regional Connections supported the family throughout the application process and provided a computer and classroom for the family and their guests to attend the virtual ceremony. It is always a very joyful moment for us all when we see our clients succeed in the life they have started in Canada.

## **Story #2: Loss and hardship results in Permanent Residency for Single Father and his 2 Sons**

A client, referred to us by MANSO through the TFW (temporary foreign worker) program, sought assistance with an invoice he had received from Manitoba Health for a medical procedure he had received. The client had been in Canada for 7 years at that point, and his Permanent Resident application had been refused due to the "medical inadmissibility" of his wife, who was diagnosed with a chronic kidney disease.

His wife passed away in August 2021 due to kidney failure. A Regional Connections Settlement Worker referred our client to our Mental Health Counsellor, who helped him cope with the grief and loss of his wife.

Through all this, we consistently monitored his Permanent Residence progress. In time IRCC reopened his Permanent Resident application.

During this time, our client also experienced additional financial setbacks due to unexpected expenses he incurred due to his wife's passing. We provided him with the assistance he needed to apply for financial aid through the CCIS TFW program. He was provided funding that helped him with his rent expenses, which had fallen behind because of his wife's passing.

We invited him to our Men's Conversation Group to connect with other people.

We were pleased to hear that Manitoba Health reimbursed our client for the surgery expenses.

The overall financial assistance that he received was a great relief to him, which helped him get through the most challenging time of his life.

Our client became a Permanent Resident in March 2022. His two sons arrived in May 2022 as Permanent Residents. Our SWIS worker assisted them with school registration.

Client: "I don't know how I would be able to cope with everything that happened to me without you at Regional Connections. Thank you so very much!"

# Employment Program

Written by Steve Reynolds (Executive Director)

The Regional Connections Employment Program had two main components in 2021/22:

- Employment Assistance Services – two Employment Facilitators help unemployed or underemployed job seekers with resumes, cover letters, job search, interview skills, and general workplace readiness. This service supports newcomers and non-newcomers across the Pembina Valley.

- o360 clients participated in the program

- o319 received resume writing support

- o159 received cover letter writing support

- o115 received interview skills support

- o208 clients gained employment

- oSome clients shifted focus to further education, stopped looking for work, or had other outcomes

- o28 clients were still looking for work at the end of the reporting year

- Professional Bridging Program (Manitoba Adult Language Training Initiative) – a Project Liaison provides direct client support and acts as a hub for Internationally Educated Professionals so that they: receive support in the credentials recognition process, are connected with workplace language training and employment skills training aligned to their goals, and have opportunities for networking events, mentoring, and workplace visits in order to build their local professional networks and improve their employment outcomes.

- o149 clients received support

- o135 received direct career counselling

- o14 attended career workshops

- o13 unemployed clients gained employment

- o145 of 149 clients indicated that “My employment situation has improved as a result of participation” and that “I am better prepared to find and maintain employment as a result of participation”

The Employment Program also ran three virtual and one in-person job fairs in partnership with dozens of regional employers, contributed to workplace cultural diversity training workshops, and liaised throughout the year with employers, Chambers of Commerce, and Economic Development Offices to stay up to date with regional labour market trends and to ensure clients receive current and accurate support, referrals, and information.

