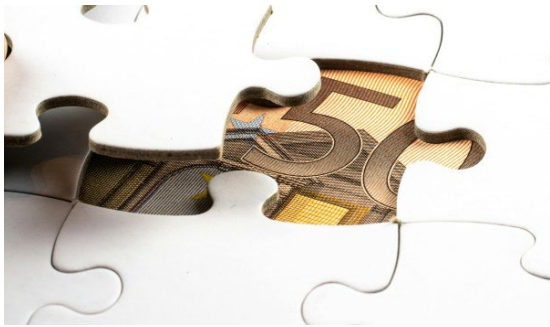


How Churches Can ‘Fill in the Gap’ in Newcomer Services after Recent Federal Funding Cuts to Newcomer Supports

- [ESL Link](#) (SOCEM newsletter)

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By Trevor Pfahl

Newcomers bring rich cultural perspectives, resilience, and generosity that can bless and strengthen the whole community. By sharing life together, we live out the vision that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile ... for you are all one” (Galatians 3:28), building communities marked by dignity, belonging, and peace.

Recent changes to immigration levels and reductions in newcomer support services across Canada have left many newcomers without the language training and guidance they need to thrive. As a result of the IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada) cuts of all CLB 5 and above language classes¹, tens of thousands of internationally trained professionals are working survival jobs and facing a five- to eight-year journey to gain recognized credentials in their career field in Canada as opposed to three to four years before the cuts. This situation brings financial pressure, cultural isolation, and emotional stress for individuals and their families.

Faith communities have an amazing opportunity to respond to this situation. Scripture reminds us, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers” (Hebrews 13:2). This can include practical help with job searches, job interviews, and workplace English classes as well as networking/mentorship opportunities and/or one-time workshops about specific careers from experienced professionals in our congregations. Creating classes filled with acceptance, encouragement, and genuine friendship in our churches reflects the heart of loving our neighbors (Mark 12:31).

Recently, I led a workshop for the metro-Vancouver ESL ministry network about ways churches can 'Fill in the Gap' with Workplace English support classes/workshops. Thirty people from 15 programs attended and/or received the video recordings. Practical suggestions included where to find free professionally made workplace English resources online, inviting volunteers to assist in roles besides facilitating ESL classes (as mentioned above), and finding and reaching out to Canadian settlement agencies in your area for mutual support. We sometimes don't realize how many free resources and free workshops these agencies provide for housing, workplace safety issues, job employment/job interviews, and other immigration challenges that newcomers face. And there are often opportunities for churches to advertise through the local settlement agencies about the classes or supports that they are offering. A recording of the workshop can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/2x5T9f8LMEM>

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Trevor keeps busy as a community liaison of Welcome Church (EFC) helping churches across Canada welcome newcomers more effectively, teaches English, and helps small businesses use social media more efficiently. He is the president of TESL Manitoba and a board member of TESL Canada.

1 Since 1996, the federal government has provided free English classes for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) levels 1-8 with levels 5-8 focusing on employment and academic support. This helped to ensure that Internationally trained professionals had a clear and successful path to find employment in their chosen career. Or else, they could improve their Academic English skills in order to pursue recognized credentials at a college or university which usually requires CLB 7 or above.

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