

Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot Project

Implementation Report

MARCH 2021



Social Research and Demonstration Corporation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	8
Background	8
Report overview	9
THE PILOT PROJECT	10
Project description	10
The four models being tested	11
Model 1 — Milestones to employment: Key features	13
Model 2 — Navigating the canadian labour market: Key Features	14
Model 3 — Partnering in workforce innovation: Key Features	15
Model 4 — Building Canadian Work Experience: Key Features	16
EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	17
Evaluation goals	17
Evaluation design and methodology	18
HOW WERE THE MODELS IMPLEMENTED BY PILOT SITES?	23
Model 1 — Milestones to employment	23
Model 2 – Navigating the Canadian Labour market	28
Model 3 – Partnering in workforce innovation	35
Model 4 – Building Canadian Work experience	38

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION	41
Number of program participants in the project	41
Profile of participants	42
IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS ACROSS INTERVENTIONS	64
What worked well?	64
What were the challenges and how were they addressed?	74
What implementation lessons were learned about providing services to visible minority newcomer women?	81
What suggestions for improvement do participants have?	82
IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS BY PILOT SITE	84
Model 1 — Milestones to employment	84
Model 2 — Navigating the Canadian Labour Market	102
Model 3 — Partnering in workforce innovation	136
Model 4 — Building canadian work experience	141
CONCLUSION	147
NEXT STEPS FOR THE EVALUATION	151
APPENDIX A: EVALUATION QUESTIONS	152

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Description
ACCES	Acces Employment
CLB	Canadian Language Benchmark
CPVMNW	Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women pilot project
IRCC	Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada
ISANS	Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
MOSAIC	MOSAIC
OFE	Opportunities for Employment
SÉO	La Société économique de l'Ontario
SPO	Service Provider Organization
SRDC	Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
VMNW	Visible Minority Newcomer Women
WSEC	World Skills Employment Centre

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMPLEMENTATION REPORT — RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Introduction

The 2018 Federal budget states that employment is key to the successful integration of newcomers to Canada, as it supports their financial independence and allows them to make social connections and build and retain job skills. The Government of Canada recognizes that visible minority newcomer women face significant barriers to finding and keeping good jobs, including language challenges, lack of Canadian work experience, lack of professional and social networks, and gender- and race-based discrimination. Some women also deal with a lack of accessible childcare and limited or interrupted education in their home country. As a result, even those who are employed may be in precarious or low-income employment. To help reduce these barriers to employment, in 2018–19 the Government announced a \$31.9 million investment to help visible minority newcomer women secure employment. One of the three funding streams in this initiative is a three-year pilot that tests enhanced employment programming for visible minority newcomer women.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) has received funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to carry out a research project to design, implement, and evaluate the pilot. The evidence and valuable learnings from the pilot project will help inform a wider implementation of approaches that are found to be efficient in supporting visible minority newcomer women in pathways to employment.

This interim report presents implementation findings for the first year of the CPVMNW Pilot project. Specifically, we document the 11 variants of the four CPVMNW models as implemented by the eight service provider organizations, explore challenges they have faced in implementing the models, summarize the characteristics of the women who have participated in the models to date, and describe what has worked well, challenges, and lessons learned to date. It also presents some early thoughts on how the interventions can be improved from the perspectives of the women who participated in the interventions and delivery staff. Since the pilot is still in progress, the findings are preliminary. The final report, planned for submission in March 2022, will present the outcomes and impacts of the pilot and will answer the evaluation questions more completely.

Project description

The Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women (CPVMNW) pilot project was designed to implement and evaluate four models, which aim to address the needs of visible minority newcomer women in their integration with the Canadian labour market. The overall goal of each model is to aid visible minority newcomer women in their successful transition to the labour market. The models differ by the target population (e.g., different skills/language levels) and by the program activities involved. Initially, all four models were designed to be offered in-person. All services transformed to virtual and remote services mid-March 2020.

The pilot project is delivered by eight service provider organizations across Canada implementing 11 interventions based on the four models: ACCES Employment, Achève, ISANS, La Société économique de l'Ontario, MOSAIC, Opportunities for Employment, World Skills Employment Centre, and the YWCA Metro Vancouver.

Evaluation goals and methodology

This report aims to partially answer the following four implementation evaluation questions described in the Evaluation Framework (SRDC, December 2019):

1. In general, was the overall project implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
2. In general, were the service delivery models implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
3. In general, were the research designs and activities implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
4. Did the programs meet the needs of the intended range of newcomer women so that they were able to complete the program?

Since the pilot project consists of four models, which are being implemented by several organizations across Canada, and there are important differences in the interventions such as eligibility and local conditions, we focus on three levels of evaluation: intervention level, model level, and overall project level. For this interim report, the intervention level evaluation will evaluate the implementation of each model as implemented by an individual service provider. The model-level evaluation will synthesize the findings from all service providers implementing the same model. Finally, the project-level evaluation will draw on the lessons learned, challenges, and best practices from all models and service providers. It will compare, contrast, and summarize the issues of implementation for all participants and service providers across Canada.

In this report, as we are investigating the implementation of the pilot project, only data from program group participants (and not those in the comparison group) is being summarized and analyzed. A mixed research methodology comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods is used to answer the implementation evaluation questions.

Key findings

Participation

- As of September 30, 2020, a total of 836 participants had participated in the 11 interventions. Participants recruited identified as visible minority newcomer women and had encountered challenges in finding employment in Canada. The participants were diverse, coming from 95 different countries. Participants in the project are highly educated with over 90 per cent having a university degree obtained outside of Canada. Participants in all models expressed high hopes for the future.
- Participants recruited were in line with the eligibility criteria for each of the models. As expected, language levels were lowest for Model 1, followed by Model 2, and then Model 3.¹ In terms of employment readiness, most participants from Models 1, 2, and 3 scored near the mid-point on the labour market readiness scales that were used.² Relative to the other groups, women in Model 4 have particularly lower levels confidence in looking for work as measured by JSSE.

Delivery

- Programs were valuable to participants. Satisfaction with the programs overall was very high and a majority of participants reported having recommended the program to other newcomer women. Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that they found most of the main activities in their program useful. In-class / virtual training / workshops, career development services, and one-on-one support from staff were ranked as useful by 80 per cent or more of participants. Staff and participants felt that the program met the needs of participants. Participants shared that they benefitted from learning about the Canadian workplace culture environment, as the work environment in participants' home countries were vastly different. They also reported feeling prepared to navigate the Canadian labour market after the completion of the program.

¹ The Model 4 intervention did not collect Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) levels.

² To measure labour market readiness of program participants, we used three scales: Job Search Clarity (JSC), Job Search Self-efficacy (JSSE), and Career Decision-making Self-efficacy (CDMSE) at baseline.

- Most sites had already started delivering their programs in person prior to the pandemic. When pandemic-related measures were enacted in March 2020, program staff quickly adapted their in-person programs for online delivery. Program staff worked smoothly to quickly adapt their in-person programs to suit the online teaching environment. Over the course of 2020, all programs shifted to, at least partial, online delivery, and program staff worked to continuously adapt the program for online delivery.
- Despite the program not having been designed to be delivered virtually, it seems to have worked out well for many participants, especially for those that had access to computer equipment and internet connection, a quiet space to attend the workshops, had the necessary digital skills to navigate the virtual environment and adequate English language levels. Shifting to an online delivery has mitigated some of the challenges related to participation and recruitment.

What worked well

- As the program was designed specifically for newcomer women, and as most program sites delivered the program as cohorts, this intentionally brought the women together and allowed friendships to be built between the women. For some participants, meeting women in the program was their first time meeting like-minded people in Canada, and these relationships made integrating into Canada easier for participants. Program staff and participants observed that women felt comfortable learning and sharing personal stories and experiences with the other women and staff. Participants felt safe to share stories or ask questions they might not have otherwise shared in groups that also included men.
- The supportive and encouraging customized and individualized support was one of the most appreciated aspects of the program, especially in improving resumes and cover letters for a specific position/intended occupation, and in supporting the job search process. The one-on-one support worked particularly well during the pandemic, because participants needed flexibility to manage both participating in the program and their family responsibilities.
- The milestones approach that was used by sites implementing Model 1 helped the participants in developing personal and career goals to follow throughout the duration of the program. This approach also allowed program staff to assess the steps participants were taking in reaching their employment goals, address challenges participants faced in their work placements, and the improvement participants made throughout the program.
- A focus on essential skills in Model 2 helped participants to identify the skills they already possessed, how to transfer these skills to other jobs, and focus on what skills needed to be improved, which all contributed to increasing participants' confidence in themselves. The development of the essential skills portfolios also acted as self-reflection exercises for some participants, which then helped participants to write targeted resumes.

Challenges

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to program delivery challenges, particularly in terms of supporting participants to find employment, as well as to personal challenges for participants and program staff. Moreover, the online format added challenges to a subset of participants, namely participants with lower official language proficiency or digital skills, those without the necessary equipment or space, and those who had to take care of their children.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, pilot sites experienced challenges in recruiting women for the program. With travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic, program staff observed that fewer permanent residents were entering Canada, which reduced the pool of potentially eligible candidates. Staff heard that some potential candidates also did not want to work outside of their homes during the pandemic out of worry that they would get COVID-19 or pass it along to their families.
- The pandemic introduced challenges for program staff in engaging with employers, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown as employers' priorities changed, and understandably put their organization and own employees first. As employers slowly started to find grounding amidst the pandemic, program staff continued to reach out the employers over LinkedIn and by emails to invite them to events.

Conclusions

In general, was the overall project implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

- Overall, the pilot project has been implemented successfully to date. Indeed, SRDC worked with eight service providers to implement eleven interventions based on the four models designed as part of Phase 1 of this project. In its first year, 836 visible minority newcomer women participated in the pilot programs across Canada. The service providers delivered their programs successfully to participants and did well engaging with them, as evidenced by surveys and feedback from participants. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has required major adaptations to the project, especially in terms of program delivery with a shift to online programming.
- While the early findings suggest the project was successfully implemented and identified implementation lessons, we need to wait until the final report to see if it achieves the employment and other related outcomes and for whom.

In general, were the service delivery models implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

- The service delivery models were implemented as planned, although the demand-led features could have been implemented more strongly. For some of the service providers, this is still an area of capacity development. Most service providers put a lot of emphasis on the employment-readiness training, including a focus on empowering women, as this component might be more familiar to them. However, connecting participants with employers is a crucial step in supporting participants in integrating into the Canadian labour market. Participants also echoed that they saw value and wanted more of those opportunities.

In general, were the research designs and activities implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

- To date, the research designs and activities have been implemented as planned in general. All pilot sites followed the selected research designs. There were initial challenges, especially with the experimental and quasi-experimental designs, as this was a first for many of the program staff involved. However, all 11 pilot sites have contributed in the data collection to support this data-driven innovation project.

Did the programs meet the needs of the intended range of newcomer women so that they were able to complete the program?

- Early evidence shows that the programs are meeting the needs of the visible minority newcomer women who are participating in the interventions. Participants were satisfied with the training and services received and a majority reported that the main program components were useful. They benefitted from learning about the Canadian workplace culture and environment, as the work environment in participants' home countries was vastly different. Participants felt more prepared to navigate the Canadian labour market after the completion of the program.

Next steps

Over the next twelve months, SRDC will continue additional data collection and analysis to broaden its knowledge of the implementation of the CPVMNW pilot projects, to investigate the value of targeted employment services for visible minority newcomer women and for employers, and to conduct a cost study. The project's final evaluation report will be submitted to IRCC in March 2022. It will focus on outcomes for participants, employers, and service providers and will include a cost analysis.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The 2018 Federal budget states that employment is key to the successful integration of newcomers to Canada, as it supports their financial independence and allows them to make social connections and build and retain job skills. The Government of Canada also recognizes that visible minority newcomer women³ (VMNW) face significant barriers to finding and keeping good jobs, including language challenges, lack of Canadian work experience, lack of professional and social networks, and gender- and race-based discrimination. Some women also deal with a lack of accessible childcare and limited or interrupted education in their home country. As a result, even those who are employed may be in precarious or low-income employment. To help reduce these barriers to employment, in 2018–19 the Government announced a \$31.9 million investment to help visible minority newcomer women secure employment. One of the three funding streams in this initiative is a three-year pilot that tests enhanced employment programming for visible minority newcomer women.

Less than one year into the three-year pilot implementation, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic changed both the Canadian labour market and service delivery, from in-person delivery to virtual. Recent data suggest that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted immigrants' labour market outcomes. According to Statistics Canada,⁴ recent female immigrants experienced the largest increase in the rate of transition to non-employment during the initial contraction of the economy in April 2020. Moreover, during the partial recovery, recent immigrants had lower transition rates from non-employment to employment compared to Canadian-born individuals in May, June, and July with recent⁵ immigrant women displaying the largest gap in comparison to their Canadian-born counterparts. Even before COVID-19, visible minority newcomer women experienced serious challenges accessing the labour market; this has worsened with COVID-19.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) has received funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to carry out a research project to design, implement, and evaluate the pilot. The evidence and valuable learnings from the pilot project

³ The term “visible minority” is used in the Employment Equity Act to define one of four designated groups. The aim of the Act is to achieve workplace equality and to correct employment disadvantages for the four groups. Visible minority persons are identified according to the Employment Equity Act as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.

⁴ Hou, Picot, & Zhang. Transitions into and out of employment by immigrants during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery. STATCAN COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada. Catalogue no. 45280001 (2020).

⁵ Recent immigrants are those who landed in Canada within the previous ten years.

will help inform a wider implementation of approaches that are found to be efficient in supporting visible minority newcomer women in pathways to employment. Moreover, it will support IRCC by building evidence to strengthen settlement and integration services and improve outcomes for newcomer women and their families.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report presents findings for the first year of implementation for the pilot project. Since the pilot is still in progress, the findings are preliminary. The final report, planned for submission in March 2022, will present the outcomes and impacts of the pilot and will answer the evaluation questions (see Appendix A) more completely.

This report begins by outlining the pilot project including the piloted models. This is followed by the evaluation scope and methodology, including the evaluation activities carried out to date. The key implementation findings from all 11 programs in the pilot are presented next, followed by case studies of each of the pilot sites. The report ends with a conclusion and next steps for the evaluation.

THE PILOT PROJECT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women (CPVMNW) pilot project was designed to implement and evaluate four models, which aim to address the needs of visible minority newcomer women in their integration with the Canadian labour market. SRDC designed the four models based on evidence from past studies of newcomers' economic integration processes, experiences of promising practices, insights from focus groups with visible minority newcomer women, and feedback from nationwide stakeholder consultations.

The pilot project involves eight service provider organizations across Canada implementing 11 interventions based on the four models.

- **ACCES Employment:** employment services agency serving clients in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario <https://accesemployment.ca/>
- **Achēv:**⁶ community-based organization that delivers employment, youth, newcomer, and language services <https://Achēv.ca/>
- **ISANS:** immigrant-serving agency in Halifax, Nova Scotia <https://www.isans.ca/>
- **La Société économique de l'Ontario:** provincial network that focuses on the francophone and bilingual community's stakeholders and works on economic development, entrepreneurship, employability and immigration <https://seo-ont.ca/>
- **MOSAIC:** immigrant-serving agency serving clients from the Metro Vancouver Area, British Columbia <https://www.mosaicbc.org/>
- **Opportunities for Employment:** employment services agency in Winnipeg, Manitoba <https://ofe.ca/>
- **World Skills:** non-profit employment centre dedicated exclusively to the employment needs of newcomers and to the needs of the local labour market <https://ottawa-worldskills.org/>
- **YWCA Metro Vancouver:** non-profit organization focused on women <https://ywcavan.org/>

⁶ Formerly The Centre for Education and Training (TCET).

The overall goal of each model is to support visible minority newcomer women in their successful transition to the labour market. The models differ by the target population (e.g., different skill/language levels) as well as by the program activities involved. Initially, all four models were designed to be offered in-person. All services were converted to virtual and remote models in mid-March 2020, although some have since returned to in-person or hybrid delivery or returned to that model for a period of time.

There are four evaluation objectives of the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot:

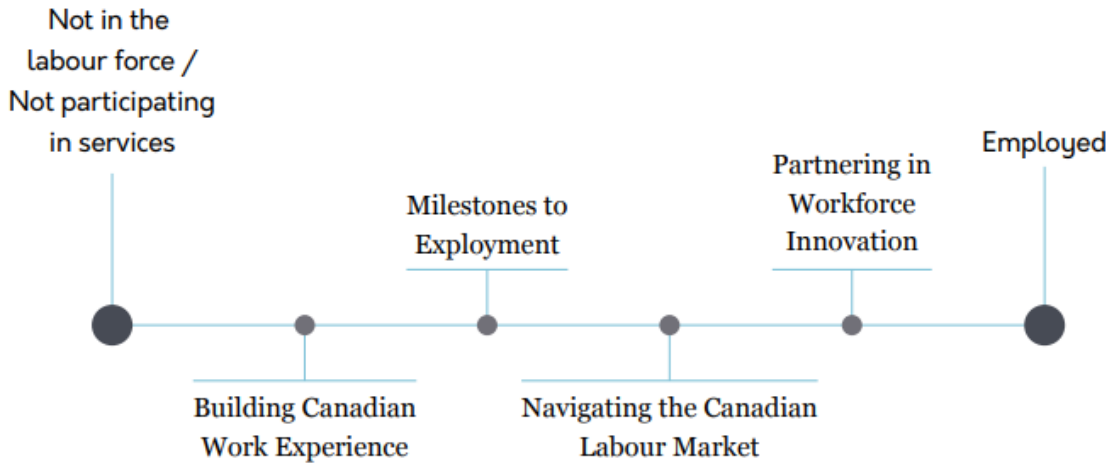
- Gather evidence on effective ways to facilitate the transition of visible minority newcomer women into the Canadian labour market;
- Establish what are promising practices for the labour market integration of visible minority newcomer women with different skill levels and varying distance from the labour market;
- Test and identify opportunities for scaling up promising interventions nationally; and
- Share and disseminate findings, best practices, and lessons learned among the settlement and employment sectors and policy-makers.

The pilot sites began providing the model services to newcomer women between August 2019 and September 2020.

THE FOUR MODELS BEING TESTED

The CPVMNW pilot project is testing four program models to better support newcomer women who identify as visible minorities in entering the Canadian labour market. The models aim to address one or more of the major barriers that these women face in their search for employment, as well as job retention. Collectively, they address the continuum of distance between people and the labour market: each model targets a specific population of newcomer women based on how distant they are from employment, and is designed to address barriers to help these specific populations get closer and/or into the labour market. Figure 1 below illustrates the continuum and where each model falls along it.

Figure 1 Pilot models on the continuum of distance from the labour market



The section below explores each of the base models as they were designed and describes how they have been implemented to date by the project's service delivery partners.

MODEL 1 — MILESTONES TO EMPLOYMENT: KEY FEATURES

Model 1: Milestones to Employment

This model revolves around a demand-led approach to jobs in high-growth industries and sectors. The model provides participants with learning pathways to gain employment with a large employer or a sector based on the completion of multiple intermediate steps, or milestones, leading to the desired employment outcomes. The program aims to facilitate and support the transition to a work placement, with the ultimate goal of continued employment and advancement. By aligning training with the newcomer women's needs while also preparing them to meet the needs of employers in specific sectors, the program ensures that job placements are beneficial for both employers and job seekers.

Target:

Newcomer women who identify as a visible minority who do not have multiple barriers that would prevent them from participating in employment services, but who are otherwise **relatively distant from the labour market** (e.g., those with little or no Canadian work experience, individuals with lower education credentials or skills, or working in precarious, part-time or “survival” jobs).

Key components:

- Employer engagement, including needs assessment
- Employment readiness training (if needed)
- Occupation-specific training
- A work placement or a work experience
- Ongoing individualized support to both the newcomer women and employers

Currently being tested by:

- Achēv,
- MOSAIC, and
- Opportunities for Employment

MODEL 2 — NAVIGATING THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET: KEY FEATURES

Model 2: Navigating the Canadian Labour Market

The model offers support in the development of a clear career plan based on a thorough assessment of the participants' skills and provides them with opportunities to connect with potential employers. This model applies the essential skills framework developed by the Government of Canada.⁷

<p>Target:</p> <p>Newcomer women who identify as a visible minority and who are ready or almost ready to work in Canada (i.e., women with postsecondary education and an adequate level of fluency in English or French).</p>	<p>Key components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment readiness training, including the development of a skills portfolio based on intended occupation ▪ Essential skills enhancement (if needed and as determined by the skills assessments) ▪ Employer connections
<p>Currently being tested by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISANS, ▪ ACCES Employment, ▪ Achēv, ▪ World Skills Employment Centre, and ▪ YWCA Metro Vancouver 	

⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/definitions.html>

MODEL 3 — PARTNERING IN WORKFORCE INNOVATION: KEY FEATURES

Model 3: Partnering in Workforce Innovation

This is a demand-driven approach that uses recruitment specialists working directly with employers/sectors with significant workforce needs to match them with women who have the skills, career interest and abilities to perform the job.

Target:

Newcomer women who identify as a visible minority and who are **ready to be employed** regardless of their education level, as the required skills will depend on the nature of the available jobs.

Key components:

- Needs assessment of employers and participants
- Employment readiness workshops or training (if needed)
- Job matching
- Ongoing individualized support

Currently being tested by:

- World Skills Employment Centre, and
- La Société économique de l'Ontario

MODEL 4 — BUILDING CANADIAN WORK EXPERIENCE: KEY FEATURES

Model 4: Building Canadian Work Experience

Designed to create paid short-term employment to assist unemployed newcomer refugee women gain meaningful work experience with non-profit organizations. Aimed at enhancing the participant's employability readiness, skills, workplace culture knowledge and network by providing a Canadian work experience opportunity.

Target:

Newcomer refugee women who identify as a visible minority, receiving social assistance and who are distant from the labour market.

Key components:

- Employment readiness training
- A paid work placement (through a 75 per cent wage subsidy)
- Ongoing individualized support

Currently being tested by:

- YWCA Metro Vancouver

EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the CPVMNW implementation evaluation goals, summarizes the pilot project design, and describes the methodology used to evaluate the implementation of the CPVMNW pilot project.

EVALUATION GOALS

As discussed, the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women pilot project was designed to implement and evaluate four models, which aim to address the needs of visible minority newcomer women in their integration with the Canadian labour market.

Implementation of the pilot project began in August 2019; this report covers from then until the end of September 2020. Specifically, we document the 11 variants of the four CPVMNW models as implemented by the eight service provider organizations, explore challenges they have faced in implementing the models, summarize the characteristics of the women who have participated in the models to date, and describe what has worked well, challenges, and lessons learned to date. The report also presents early thoughts on how the interventions can be improved from the perspectives of the women who participated in the interventions and service delivery staff.

Given the significant changes to service delivery and to the Canadian labour market due to the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of the pilot project, an analysis of the implementation changes and challenges due to the pandemic will be conducted and reported in the March 2022 final report (further discussions of the impact of COVID-19 on the pilot project are discussed in the *Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women and COVID-19* briefing note (January 2021)). Findings from the implementation evaluation will also help guide the interpretation of the outcomes and impact evaluation results presented in the final report.

This report aims to answer the following four implementation evaluation questions described in the evaluation framework (SRDC, December 2019):

1. In general, was the overall project implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
2. In general, were the service delivery models implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
3. In general, were the research designs and activities implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
4. Did the programs meet the needs of the intended range of newcomer women so that they were able to complete the program?

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Since the pilot project consists of four models being implemented by several organizations across Canada, and there are important differences in the interventions – such as eligibility and local conditions – we focus on three levels of evaluation: intervention level, model level, and overall project level. For this interim report, the intervention level evaluation will evaluate the implementation of each model as implemented by an individual service provider. The model level evaluation will synthesize the findings from all service providers implementing the same model. Finally, the project level evaluation will draw on the lessons learned, challenges, and best practices from all models and service providers. It will compare, contrast, and summarize the issues of implementation for all participants and service providers across Canada.

A comparative case study approach⁸ is being used to evaluate the implementation of the pilot project. It will assess the design and implementation of the interventions by each service provider in terms of delivery, adaptations to the model, alignment with VMNW’s needs and other employment and integration programs, program scalability, and stakeholder outcomes.

The analysis will be guided by a **Gender Based Analysis (GBA+)** lens, which ensures that diversity and inclusion are part of the evaluation process.⁹ GBA+ is a method for examining how gender and other intersecting identity factors, such as age, culture, language, education, income, geography, and ethnicity affect a person’s experience of the CPVMNW project.

The design of the CPVMNW evaluation differed across service provider organization and model. Where feasible (that is, where a sufficient sample size allowed for the use of the law of large numbers), a randomized

Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in the context of this project

The participants who are taking part in the CPVMNW pilot project are not a homogenous group; in fact, they are very diverse. This diversity may impact their experience of the CPVMNW pilot project. Using a GBA+ lens throughout the analysis allows the evaluation to explore how participants with differing experiences and characteristics experience the CPVMNW pilot.

Moreover, the initial design of the four CPVMNW models targeted women at varying distances from the labour market. A GBA+ lens also provides a framework for investigating the intersectionality of factors affecting someone’s distance to the labour market and the effectiveness of the intended model targeting.

⁸ Yin, R. K. Case study research: design and methods. Sage Publications (2009).

⁹ Government of Canada Gender-based Analysis Plus. Retrieved from: <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-ac/index-en.html>.

controlled trial (RCT)¹⁰ was implemented. Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (Model 2), Opportunities for Employment (Model 1), la Société économique de l'Ontario (Model 3, Ottawa and Toronto locations), Achēv (Model 2) and World Skills Employment Centre (Models 2 and 3) are implementing randomized controlled trials. Where an RCT is not feasible, a quasi-experimental design using an alternative comparison group sample was selected. This is the case for ACCES (Model 2). The sample size of project participants of the YWCA Metro Vancouver (Models 2 and 4), MOSAIC (Model 1), and Achēv (Model 1) is small, and as such, a proof of concept/case study evaluation approach will be used. Further details of the evaluation design can be found in the Evaluation Framework.

Table 1 Evaluation designs

Model	Service provider	Evaluation design
Model 1 – Milestones to Employment	Achēv	Proof of concept
	MOSAIC	Proof of concept
	OFE	Randomized controlled trial
Model 2 – Navigating the Canadian Labour Market	Achēv	Randomized controlled trial
	ACCES	Quasi-experimental design
	ISANS	Randomized controlled trial
	WSEC	Randomized controlled trial
	YWCA Metro Vancouver	Proof of concept
Model 3 – Partnering in Workforce Innovation	La Société économique de l'Ontario	Randomized controlled trial (Ottawa and Toronto locations) Proof of concept (Sudbury location)
	WSEC	Randomized controlled trial
Model 4 – Building Canadian Work Experience	YWCA Metro Vancouver	Proof of concept

¹⁰ A randomized controlled trial randomly assigns those eligible for the program into one group that participates in the program and another group that forms the comparison group. The comparison group experiences can be taken as reflective of what would have happened to participants if the program had not existed. Given that program participation for these participants was randomly assigned, the average effect of the program can be rigorously estimated by comparing the outcomes of interest between the program and comparison group members.

In this report, as we are investigating the implementation of the pilot project, **only data from program group participants (and not those in the comparison group) are being summarized and analyzed.** A mixed research methodology comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods is used to answer the implementation evaluation questions. Data sources for this report are outlined below in Table 2.

Data included in this report:

The baseline survey and Program Management Information System (PMIS) data included in this report was collected **up to and including September 30, 2020**, and only data from program participants was included. Focus groups with program participants and interviews with service delivery staff took place in October and November 2020.

By this time, participants from all service provider organizations had begun project activities while some, but not all, participants had completed project activities. At the time of writing, participants continue to be recruited to join the program by all service provider organizations until spring 2021.

Participant timelines are further described in the Implementation findings by pilot site section of the report. The final report will expand on this interim report and also include data collected from October 1, 2020 onward.

Table 2 **Data sources for the evaluation**

Data source	Description	Quantitative	Qualitative
Participant level			
Baseline survey	A baseline survey was completed by incoming participants before they began participating in the program. With participants' consent, the survey collected information about their demographics, education, reading and math skills, employment history, social network, health, financial well-being, career outcomes, and settlement experiences, after arriving in Canada.	Yes	Yes
Follow-up survey	The first follow-up survey repeated most of the topics from the baseline survey, but it also included questions on program satisfaction and participation outcomes. It was sent to participants between three and five months after they joined the program, depending on the duration of the intervention. For this report, only questions about program satisfaction from this survey were analyzed.	Yes	Yes
Essential skills assessment	At the same time as the baseline and follow-up surveys, participants of Models 2 and 4 ¹¹ were asked to complete online assessments in four essential skills: document use, numeracy, digital skills, and listening skills. Only baseline essential skill assessment results were analyzed in this report.	Yes	No
Interviews and focus groups	Conducted online with a small group of participants to obtain more in-depth information about their experience with the program and with their search for employment. For this report, 12 focus groups and 4 interviews were conducted with a total of 78 program group participants.	No	Yes
Projects Management Information System (PMIS)	Spreadsheet completed regularly by program staff to track participant information on enrollment, program and research activities, employment services, placements, and outcomes.	Yes	Yes

¹¹ The YWCA Metro Vancouver Aspire Program (Model 4) only completed the listening assessment.

Data source	Description	Quantitative	Qualitative
Pilot site level			
Monthly reports	The pilot sites completed reports and participated in calls with SRDC researchers on a monthly basis to share progress on participant and employer pilot enrollment numbers, work placements, challenges and opportunities, lessons learned and success stories. The calls provided opportunities for SRDC and the sites to discuss any data collection or implementation issues that had arisen, as well as to plan for upcoming data collection.	Yes	Yes
Pilot site staff interviews	Each of the pilot sites participated in interviews in which they shared information about the pilot's implementation, outcomes, lessons learned, challenges and successes. 11 online interviews were conducted with a total of 30 staff.	No	Yes
Quarterly reports	Pilot sites completed quarterly reports to provide IRCC with updates on targets, activities, and challenges. For this report, we used the April–June and July–September 2020 reports. ¹²	Yes	Yes
Annual report	Pilot sites completed an annual report in iCARE to provide IRCC with a progress update that included their client type profiles, client needs, support services offered, delivery, partnerships, client feedback and client success stories.	Yes	Yes
Site visits / activity observations	Site liaisons attended in-person or virtual site visits in which they sat in on workshops to better understand how the program was being delivered.	No	Yes

¹² The first quarterly report to be filled out by sites was for the April–June 2020 period.

HOW WERE THE MODELS IMPLEMENTED BY PILOT SITES?

In this section, we will explore how each model described previously was implemented by pilot sites. Differences and commonalities across pilot sites will be highlighted.

MODEL 1 — MILESTONES TO EMPLOYMENT

Achēv, MOSAIC, and OFE are testing Model 1 — Milestones to Employment, a demand-led intervention that creates a pathway for participants to obtain jobs in in-demand occupations. Table 3 below summarizes how each service partner implemented their Model 1 interventions.

Table 3 **Summary of Model 1 interventions**

	Achēv	MOSAIC	Opportunities for Employment (OFE)
Name of program	Milestones to Employment https://Achēv.ca/service/milestones-to-employment-fornewcomer-women/	Care Pathways https://www.mosaicbc.org/services/employment/care-pathways/	Career Pathways Program https://ofe.ca/career-pathways-program-cpp/
Geographic region	Greater Toronto Area	Metro Vancouver	Winnipeg
Eligibility criteria besides PR	CLB 4 or higher, little/no Canadian work experience, lower education, and skill levels, and unemployed or working in part-time or survival job	CLB 4 (5 preferred), prior experience/interested in Health Care Aid; one or more barriers to entering HCA training/becoming an HCA	Have no or limited Canadian work experience and would like to have long-term employment in one of the in-demand job sectors of the program
Expected # of participants	75 (5 cohorts)	45 (3 cohorts)	224 (program/control ratio is 70/30; continuous intake)
Sectors targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dietary aide in a senior care facility¹³ (3 cohorts) ▪ Commercial cleaning (2 cohorts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dietary aide or housekeeper in a senior care facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manufacturing and production ▪ Health services support ▪ Customer contact industry ▪ Retail

¹³ Prior to changes to the labour market due to the pandemic, the initial sector targeted was airline catering.

	Achêv	MOSAIC	Opportunities for Employment (OFE)
Main components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-week workplace and occupational specific essential skills in-class training, including employability skills development and employment readiness 2 additional weeks of occupation-specific training for participants in the commercial cleaning stream Food handling and ORCA training and certification for participants in the senior care stream 12-week paid work placement with employer partners Retention services Measurements for monitoring milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-week workplace and occupational specific essential skills in-class training, including employment readiness skills and communications First aid, Foodsafe, and WHMIS training and certification 12-week paid job placement in senior care facility operated by employer partner or support in obtaining employment in a related position 3-month post-placement support Measurements for monitoring milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-week workplace preparation training 1-week occupational specific essential skills training (15-60 hours) 2-week paid workplace placement in in-demand jobs Retention support Performance payments for achieving milestones
Length of formal program	<p>18 weeks for commercial cleaning stream (incl. work placement)</p> <p>16 weeks for senior care stream (incl. work placement)</p>	16 weeks (incl. work placement)	4 weeks (incl. work placement)
Agreement period	February 2020 – November 2021	February 2020 – December 2021	January 2020 – September 2021

Overall, Model 1 interventions were well implemented by service partners, although in practice, they were less demand-led than initially anticipated, in part due to the pandemic. There are two marked differences between the models as planned and the models as implemented.

First, employers and/or sector associations were not as involved in the planning, design, and delivery of the programs. Initially, service partners worked with employers and or sector associations to identify in-demand occupations. However, the level of involvement of employers who agreed to partner in the design of the occupation-specific curriculum ranged from minimal to some involvement. MOSAIC and Achēv launched during the pandemic; they targeted sectors that were affected by the changing labour market and had challenges in obtaining input from employers. Of the four sectors targeted by Opportunities for Employment (OFE), employers in only one sector were fully engaged in the design of the curriculum. Others still agreed to be part of the project, but their involvement in the design was limited. Some of the challenges were due to the pandemic, others were due to champions within the employer partners leaving the organization which resulted in less engagement.

Second, as designed, Model 1 included a work placement. All three service partners also included a work placement¹⁴ in their program, however, the definition of what constitutes a work placement was sometimes unclear. Some participants did get placed in a job in which the employer had agreed to provide a work placement, others found related employment that was not a work placement. The distinction between a work placement and a job is mostly related to the additional supports provided to participants in the former.

The participants who were recruited to be part of the program seemed to align with the target population in that they had lower language levels and were further away from the labour market. More details can be found in the Profile of Participants section.

We asked staff for whom the program seemed to work best, and they indicated that women with little to no work experience in Canada seemed to be best suited for this program. They also mentioned that participants who had a positive mindset, were committed to finding employment, and who attended most sessions were better positioned than others. The final report will address this question in more detail.

Each of the program components is discussed below.

¹⁴ At OFE, a two-week work experience is offered by some employers, although it is less common.

Milestones approach

All three sites developed five or six milestones to help job seekers reach a series of intermediate success indicators believed to be associated with progress towards sustainable employment. Since they were developed with SRDC's guidance, all three included similar indicators such as gains in language skills, essential skills or employability skills needed for the job, employment, and job retention at three months. For more details on the milestones specific to each intervention, see the Implementation Findings by Pilot Site section.

Milestones were used by all three pilot sites to collect information to track participants' progress towards outcomes. OFE is the only service partner that had incentive payments attached to each milestone: IRCC issued premium payments to OFE semi-annually with the amount based on achievements above and beyond the calculated standard for each milestone.

Occupation-specific training

All three interventions include occupation-specific training focusing on employment readiness and occupation-specific skills. The employment readiness training varies in length across programs: OFE offers a one-week training program (if deemed necessary for the participant) while Achēv and MOSAIC each offer a four-week program. A majority of participants completed at least 75 per cent of the training (91 per cent for Achēv, 100 per cent for MOSAIC, and 85 per cent for OFE). The employment readiness training used occupation-specific examples, and when possible, employer-specific examples to facilitate the transition from the classroom to employment.

In addition, all three programs offer training to help participants acquire certifications required by employers. OFE offers a one-week training program covering such items as following instructions, health and safety, role playing, customer service, and interview preparation. Achēv offers a two-week in-person training program in the commercial cleaning stream upon completion of which participants received a certificate. It also offers certification in food handling and Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA) training for the senior care stream. MOSAIC offers Foodsafe, first aid, and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) certifications as part of its program.

A work placement

All three programs include a work placement, although not all participants partook in this aspect of the intervention. As mentioned above, it was not always clear when participants were participating in a work placement and when they were simply employed. For example, Achēv participants were offered work placements with employer partners, but they were required to go

through the usual employment application process in order to obtain one. The process was similar for MOSAIC. In OFE's program, some employers offered a two-week job placement to candidates with the view of seeing if the person met the requirements for the job. Other participants were connected directly with employers for employment. Work placements will be further explored in the final report since, as of September 30, 2020, only 12 per cent of OFE participants (since not all employers offer work placements), 8 per cent of MOSAIC's (due to issues with the employer partner), and none of Achēv's (due to unanticipated difficulties in the recruitment process) had taken part in a work placement.

Ongoing individualized support

Individualized support is a key component of each of the three Model 1 interventions in which staff work with participants to develop an action plan and support participants in their job search for both work placements and employment. This support occurs in a number of ways, including resume preparation, application help, interview preparation, coaching, and ongoing support once employed.

MODEL 2 – NAVIGATING THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET

Achēv, ACCES, ISANS, World Skills, and the YWCA Metro Vancouver are testing interventions based on Model 2 – Navigating the Canadian Labour Market – which is characterized by its foundation in the essential skills framework developed by the Government of Canada. Table 4 below summarizes the main characteristics of each program.

All five sites implemented interventions that are closely aligned with how Model 2 was designed with a focus on using essential skills as the basis to understand the skills needed for participants' intended occupation. Each program included a discussion of essential skills, the development of an essential skills portfolio, and opportunities for essential skills enhancements. Most programs also provided opportunities for participants to connect with employers.

One area in which the implemented interventions differed from the initial design was in the essential skills enhancement component. The intent of the essential skills enhancement component was to provide participants with resources on the four essential skills being assessed¹⁵ so that they could address minor skill gaps on their own. Participants ended up wanting to take formal courses or workshops to improve their skills in these areas. Feedback from staff highlighted that the resources provided as part of the essential skills assessment platform were not sufficient and/or not as useful as intended. Moreover, resources were only

¹⁵ Document use, numeracy, digital skills, and listening.

provided for the four formally assessed essential skills. Three of the five pilot sites — ACCES, Achēv, and ISANS — referred a majority of their participants to skills enhancement in at least one essential skill.

As designed, connections with employers were only a small part of Model 2. However, staff identified early on that this was an important component for participants, and, thus, several sites included varied activities to connect employers and participants. The importance of connecting with employers was echoed by participants with whom we have consulted.

The individuals who were recruited to be part of the program seemed to align with the target population in that most of them had higher language skills and were highly educated. More details can be found in the Profile of Participants section.

Staff were asked for whom the program worked best. Staff in Model 2 expressed that the program worked best for women with high proficiency in English. Women with Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 6 and higher were seen to get the most out of the program, while staff noted that women with CLB 5 and below had a hard time keeping up with the program due to their lower language level. Consequently, instead of participating in job development or job interview practice, they spent time on language classes, which was not part of the program. Staff in Model 2 also noted that women with a specific career goal or who knew what they wanted to get out the program achieved the best outcomes. In terms of sectors, staff specifically mentioned that women in HR, business, finance, or IT did better because it was easier to network with professionals on LinkedIn for those industries.

Each of the program components is discussed below.

Table 4 **Summary of Model 2 interventions**

Organization	World Skills Employment Centre	Achēv	YWCA Metro Vancouver	ACCES	ISANS
Name of program	Empowering Newcomer Women https://ottawa-worldskills.org/empowering-newcomer-women-program/	Career Pathways for Women https://Achēv.ca/service/career-pathways-for-women-2/	Elevate Skills https://ywcavan.org/elevate-skills	Career Pathways for Newcomer Women https://accesemployment.ca/career-pathways-for-newcomer-women	Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work https://www.isans.ca/find-employment/visible-minority-newcomer-women-at-work/
Geographic region	Ottawa	Greater Toronto Area	Metro Vancouver	Greater Toronto Area	Halifax Regional Municipality
Target group: eligibility besides PR	CLB 5–6 Must be unemployed or underemployed	Postsecondary education CLB 7+	Unemployed or precariously employed Postsecondary education or higher Adequate level of English (suggested CLB 6+)	Postsecondary degree holder CLB 7+	Postsecondary education CLB 5+
Expected # of participants	500 (250 program / 250 control)	420 (210 program / 210 control)	140 (70 program with employer engagement activities and 70 program without employer engagement)	320 (160 program / 160 comparison)	240 (120 program / 120 control)

Organization	World Skills Employment Centre	Achêv	YWCA Metro Vancouver	ACCES	ISANS
Main components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Career planning and portfolio building ▪ Essential skill enhancement referral and support ▪ Recruitment specialist, job matching and leadership series ▪ Mentoring ▪ Post-placement support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2-week portfolio building and career planning ▪ Essential skill enhancement referral and support ▪ Employer connections ▪ Individualized support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3-week portfolio building and career planning ▪ Essential skill enhancement referral and support ▪ Employer connections ▪ Individualized support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 5-week portfolio building and career planning ▪ Creative problem solving (cohorts 2-7) ▪ Online assessment platform and video portfolio (cohorts 5-7) ▪ Essential skills enhancement referral and support (10 weeks) ▪ Individualized support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-week portfolio building and career planning ▪ Essential skills enhancement referral and support ▪ Individualized support
Length of formal program	2 weeks	12 weeks	Up to 16 weeks	15 weeks	16 weeks
Agreement period	July 2019 – September 2021	July 2019 – September 2021	July 2019 – July 2021	August 2019 – September 2021	August 2019 – September 2021

Employment readiness training, including the development of a skills portfolio

All five interventions provide a group training on employment readiness with a focus on essential skills. The length of the training ranged from two to three weeks (Achēv, YWCA, World Skills) to five to six weeks (ISANS, ACCES). In addition to introducing essential skills, topics covered include job search skills, Canadian workplace culture training, employability skills (i.e., resume writing, interview skills), creating an online presence (including LinkedIn), networking skills, diversity and inclusion, and employment rights and workplace health and safety in Canada. A majority of participants completed at least 75 per cent of the training (ACCES: 85 per cent, Achēv: 94 per cent, ISANS: 71 per cent, WSEC: 70 per cent, and YWCA: 90 per cent). Table 5 below presents the average number of hours spent in group training for each program.

Table 5 Average number of hours spent in group training for each program

	ACCES	Achēv	ISANS	WSEC	YWCA
Average number of hours spent in group training	32	35	68	30	47

The program design of all five programs includes the development of an essential skills portfolio that showcases participants' work history, credentials, essential skills, and concrete examples of how they had used these in their work. Participants then present their portfolio to others in their group. Most programs provide time during the in-class/virtual training to work on the portfolio. A majority of participants at each site completed the essential skills portfolio (ACCES: 74 per cent, Achēv: 75 per cent, ISANS: 76 per cent, WSEC: 52 per cent, and YWCA: 80 per cent).

The degree to which essential skills were interwoven throughout the employment readiness training varies across service providers. Some programs treat essential skills as a separate topic from job search and the Canadian workplace while others base all their training content on essential skills. One component that is common to all five programs was to ask participants to use the essential skills profiles created by the Government of Canada to compare their essential skills scores in the four assessed skills with the scores required needed for the job they are interested in. The goal is to identify where their skills match and where there might be gaps and ultimately to help participants align the two.

Essential skills enhancement

In their one-on-one meetings with staff, participants develop an action plan for how to continue improving their skills in the areas in which they had identified gaps. Most of the service providers share the links provided in the essential skill assessment platform¹⁶ as a first step. As mentioned above, some participants chose to enroll in formal courses such as language and computer courses to pursue their upskilling. Table 6 below presents information about essential skills enhancement.

Table 6 Data on essential skills enhancement for each of the Model 2 programs

Activity	ACCES	Achêv	ISANS	WSEC	YWCA
Average number of hours spent on ES enhancement	23	5	11	32	59
% who were referred to at least 1 essential skill enhancement	100	96	82	40	48
% referred to Numeracy enhancement	32	94	20	2	4
% referred to Communication enhancement	99	96	59	40	33
% referred to Working with Others enhancement	95	98	20	0	1
% referred to Reading enhancement	0	51	27	31	4
% referred to Writing enhancement	0	16	39	35	6
% referred to Thinking enhancement	0	10	0	2	0
% referred to Document Use enhancement	49	96	8	2	16
% referred to Continuous Learning enhancement	98	93	63	17	30
% referred to Digital Skills enhancement	27	92	45	13	13

¹⁶ The essential skills assessment platform was developed by the Essential Skills Group for this project.

Activity	ACCES	Achêv	ISANS	WSEC	YWCA
% who decided to go ahead with at least 1 essential skill enhancement	100	95	73	35	42
% who decided to pursue Numeracy enhancement	32	92	10	2	4
% who decided to pursue Communication enhancement	98	94	47	33	29
% who decided to pursue Working with Others enhancement	95	97	18	0	1
% who decided to pursue Reading enhancement	0	49	22	25	3
% who decided to pursue Writing enhancement	0	15	29	29	4
% who decided to pursue Thinking enhancement	0	9	0	2	0
% who decided to pursue Document Use enhancement	49	94	4	2	15
% who decided to pursue Continuous Learning enhancement	98	91	53	17	28
% who decided to pursue Digital Skills enhancement	27	90	31	13	12

Employer connections

While connecting participants to jobs is not the focus of Model 2, all five programs¹⁷ have included opportunities for participants to connect with employers. Some of those opportunities have been found to be more meaningful for participants (e.g., individual, or small group sessions with an employer) than others (e.g., guest speakers with limited interaction). A few of the service providers tapped into their organization's broader network of employers to connect

¹⁷ Note that the YWCA offered some cohorts without employer engagement to test the effectiveness of different variants of the model.

participants directly with employers with job opportunities in line with their skills and experience and to host job/career fairs.

Individualized support

Individualized support is a key component of all five interventions. While the training provides general skills and knowledge on job search and the Canadian workplace, the individualized support provides occupation-specific support tailored to the participant's situation. During these one-on-one meetings, staff provide coaching to help participants in applying for jobs, getting their resumes adapted for the job, and preparing for interviews. The amount of support provided varies from client to client.

MODEL 3 – PARTNERING IN WORKFORCE INNOVATION

World Skills and La Société économique de l'Ontario (SÉO) are testing Model 3 – Partnering in Workforce Innovation – which is a demand-driven program focusing on working with both employers and candidates to match qualified participants with job opportunities. Table 7 below summarizes the main characteristics of the Model 3 programs.

In practice, Model 3 programs were less demand-driven than initially designed. There are two marked differences between the design and its implementation.

First, job matching is a key characteristic of Model 3 programs. As designed, a recruitment specialist works with employers to identify opportunities and requirements for those positions. The recruitment specialist then looks to find and refer to the employer a potential candidate who has the skills, career interest and abilities to perform the job. As intended, the role of the recruitment specialist is as an intermediary between the employer and the candidate. In practice, program staff were more invested in working with candidates to find them job opportunities that matched their skills and experience. When the service provider has established relationships with employers, program staff connected with them to learn more about job opportunities and to endorse referred candidates. However, in many cases, a job match was defined as informing participants of job openings and supporting them in applying for the position.

Second, aside than job matching, the supports to employers were not implemented as intended. As designed as part of Model 3, program staff provide support to participants as well as to employers. In the programs implemented by World Skills and SÉO, program staff focused their support on participants. In the fall of 2020, both programs were working on developing deeper relationships with large employers with the aim of becoming a partner of choice for qualified candidates.

The eligibility criteria for programs based on Model 3 were broader than for other models. A profile of Model 3 participants can be found in the Profile of Participants section.

Staff were asked for whom their programs worked best. They felt that women motivated and committed to finding employment and attending all sessions got the most out of the program.

Each of the program components is discussed below.

Table 7 **Summary of Model 3 interventions**

	World Skills Employment Centre	Société économique de l'Ontario
Name	Empowering Newcomer Women https://ottawa-worldskills.org/empowering-newcomer-women-program/	Carrielles https://seo-ont.ca/en/employability/job-seekers
Geographic region	Ottawa	Ottawa region Toronto region Sudbury region
Eligibility criteria besides PR	CLB 7+	French-speaking
Target	500 (250 program/250 control)	Ottawa: 120 (70P/50C) Toronto: 200 (100P/100C) Sudbury: 30 program
Main components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job Competency Building and Empowerment Recruitment Specialist, job matching and leadership series Mentoring Post-placement support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized job search support Job matching Employability workshops
Length of formal program	1 week	No defined length
Agreement period	July 2019 – September 2021	August 2019 – September 2021

Needs assessment of employers and participants

As a first step in the program, staff meet with participants to assess their needs, skills, and experience as well as to understand their employment goals. In addition to the initial needs assessment meetings, SÉO conducts a skills assessment using tools from the Government of Canada as well as a personality dimensions test.

In terms of needs assessments of employers, SÉO partnered with le Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario to identify francophone and bilingual employers, their projected hiring needs, job types, and French skills required.

Employment readiness workshops or training (if needed)

World Skills and SÉO took different approaches to providing training. World Skills developed a 35-hour employment readiness training that is an integral part of the program. It covers topics such as writing a targeted resume, interview skills, career mapping, networking, using LinkedIn, and creating a job action plan. As described by staff, the training emphasizes practical aspects of job search so that participants can apply them on their own. Participants partake in the training prior to job matching. 74 per cent of World Skills participants completed at least 75 per cent of the group training.

SÉO's program relies more heavily on individualized job search support; however, a few online group workshops on employment topics such as employability and self-confidence were offered. Participants can choose whether or not to attend the workshops based on their needs.

Job matching

World Skills and SÉO developed relationships with employers, and, in turn, these employers send them job postings, sometimes exclusively. Program staff then share these opportunities with qualified participants and support them in preparing and applying for the positions. At times, staff followed up with employers to better understand the position and its requirements as well as to obtain feedback on the participant who applied for the position. On average, each World Skill participants were matched with 2.8 job opportunities, while SÉO's had an average of 1.9 job opportunities. Both World Skills and SÉO also host events in which participants and employers connect around specific employment opportunities.

Individualized support

Individualized support is one of the key components of the Model 3 programs, reflecting the fact that each person's employment pathway is unique to them. Staff support participants during the job search process by helping them to connect with employers for informational interviews (World Skills), helping participants understand which jobs they are qualified for, supporting them to develop a targeted resume, practicing interview skills, and, sometimes, supporting clients in applying for positions. Staff in both programs also provide individualized support to participants during the first few months of employment. If participants lose their job, staff work with them to find a new one.

MODEL 4 – BUILDING CANADIAN WORK EXPERIENCE

Model 4 – Building Canadian Work Experience – is being tested in only one pilot site. This section is slightly different than the ones above in that it presents the key features of the model as implemented by the YWCA Metro Vancouver. Table 8 below summarizes the main characteristics of its program.

This model aims to provide Canadian work experience through a short-term work placement in which the participating employers receive a 75 per cent wage subsidy for employing a program participant for a maximum duration of 12 weeks. Since the program was designed for refugee women with multiple barriers, the program was not necessarily intended to provide a work experience commensurate with experience. The Canadian work experience was meant as a step forward in integrating into the labour market. However, participants were not satisfied with a random work placement; they wanted it to be aligned with their experience and expertise, and so the program sought to find commensurate work placements. Moreover, initially the YWCA had intended to work with non-profit organizations, but this proved difficult as many organizations indicated that they were not able to cover the other 25 per cent of the wage. Some organizations decided not to accept the wage subsidy if it was filling a position for which they were already hiring. To adjust for these restrictions, the project looked to the private sector as well as the non-profit sector for work placements.

The process of finding a work placement also differed from the initial design. Originally, the intent was for the YWCA job developer to find the work placements for participants. This proved to be challenging, especially with the focus on commensurate placements. Participants were then invited to also look for opportunities for their own work placements with support from staff. Not all participants were able to find work placements, due in part to the challenges brought forward by the pandemic.

The individuals who were recruited to be part of the program seem to align with the target population in that they are refugees, about half had received provincial income assistance benefits or Resettlement Assistance Program, and scored lower than other model participants in the listening essential skills assessment. More details can be found in the Profile of Participants section.

Staff were asked for whom their programs worked best. They noted that those with higher language skills had an easier time finding employment than those with lower language skills. Employers were willing to hire them through the job placement even if they did not have Canadian work experience, but they were more reluctant to do so when language levels were low.

Each of the program components is discussed below.

Table 8 **Summary of the Model 4 intervention**

YWCA Metro Vancouver	
Name	Aspire https://ywcavan.org/aspire
Geographic region	Metro Vancouver
Eligibility criteria besides PR	Refugee Currently on Resettlement Assistance OR receiving Income Assistance OR a privately-sponsored refugee Unemployed and not a full-time student
Target	72 women
Main components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-week employment readiness training ▪ One-on-one meetings with career advisor as needed ▪ Up to 12 weeks of paid work placement ▪ Weekly conversation circles during placement period ▪ 3 or 4 weeks of post-placement support
Length of formal program	Up to 22 weeks (incl. work placement)
Agreement period	July 2019 – July 2021

Employment readiness training

Participants attend employment readiness workshops three days a week as part of a six-week group training program. The workshops cover the following themes: identifying strengths and goals, preparing for work placements and work search strategies, and ensuring successful work placements. On the other two days of the week, participants receive individualized support to find a placement. 91 per cent of participants took part in at least 75 per cent of the training.

A paid work placement with a wage subsidy

Participants can receive up to 12 weeks of paid work placement. They are supported to apply for and obtain work placements and continue to receive support and check-ins with staff throughout the placement period. Employers are provided a 75 per cent wage subsidy, if desired, and staff work with employers to ensure that participants are well supported. For those who were in receipt of social assistance, staff explain the impact of earnings on their social assistance benefits if they work above the allowable earnings exemption level.

In reality, not all participants found a work placement within the 12-week period following the training. As mentioned, some participants were more particular about wanting a job that was commensurate with their skills and experience, which made it more difficult to match them with available placement opportunities or find employment. For some, language was a barrier to obtaining a placement. In some cases, there were external factors that prevented participants from working, like childcare, health issues, work permit issues, family challenges; in other cases, they had specific expectations about the type of work they were willing to accept. Staff noted that for some participants, cleaning occupations had a cultural stigma. The pandemic also impacted the work placements: some participants were unwilling to work outside of the home during the pandemic for health reasons, or could not due to childcare needs.

Ongoing support

Ongoing support is provided in both group and individual formats. Staff worked with each participant to find and apply for a placement in their field of interest. Participants also receive 3-4 weeks of post-placement support, where they receive individualized coaching, update their employment action plans and resumes, and identify any services or supports they might need. Staff noted that, due to the additional challenges and stress of the pandemic, participants required more one-on-one support for personal and employment reasons than had initially been planned.

In addition, participants are invited to join weekly discussion groups with their peers to discuss any challenges and learnings from their work placements or their continued job search for those who have not yet started their work placement.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

In this section, we describe participants who had joined a CPVMNW model implemented by one of eight service provider organizations before October 1, 2020. These summary statistics are presented by model, enabling a qualitative description of participants' distances from the labour market, and, therefore, the effectiveness of the targeting of each model as depicted in Figure 1 earlier in the report.

NUMBER OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROJECT

As of September 30, 2020, 836 participants had participated in the 11 interventions in the first year of the pilot.

Table 9 presents the number of participants recruited by service provider organization. In the first year of the pilot, the majority (57 per cent) of program participants participated in Model 2. Given that five of the 11 interventions implemented in the pilot are based on Model 2, this is not surprising. Participants in Model 3 account for the second highest share (24 per cent) of participants. Though Model 3 was implemented by only two service providers, the target recruitment size of both programs was above average for the pilot. Participants in Model 1 account for 14 per cent of all program participants with the remaining 5 per cent of participants having participated in Model 4 which was offered by only one service provider organization.

Table 9 Program participation

Model	SPO	Number of participants	Percentage of total pilot participants
1	Achēv Model 1	11	1
1	MOSAIC	12	1
1	OFE	92	11
2	ACCES	108	13
2	Achēv Model 2	125	15
2	ISANS	80	10
2	WSEC Model 2	56	7
2	YWCA Model 2	99	12

Model	SPO	Number of participants	Percentage of total pilot participants
3	SÉO	53	6
3	WSEC Model 3	154	18
4	YWCA Model 4	46	5
Total		836	100

Notes: Interventions began between August 2019 and February 2020 and varied by SPO and model.
Data as of September 30, 2020.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The sample of participants described in this report represents the population of 836 CPVMNW program participants¹⁸ who joined the pilot prior to October 1, 2020. This section describes some of their sociodemographic characteristics as self-reported in an online baseline survey completed by each participant prior to joining the program.

Most participants immigrated to Canada in either the economic class (48 per cent as the primary applicant, 17 per cent as the primary applicant's spouse, and 3 per cent as a dependent), the family class (17 per cent), refugee (12 per cent), or other admission category (3 per cent). This was true in all models except Model 4, which was designed to support refugees and in which 93 per cent of participants had immigrated to Canada as refugees. A typical (median) participant started the program 11 months after arriving in Canada¹⁹ and 90 per cent of participants had joined the pilot within 4.5 years after arriving in Canada.²⁰ Ninety per cent of program participants are between 21 and 45 years old, suggesting the pilot was successful in targeting women in the labour force. The average age of participants in the program is 36 years old.

Participants immigrated from 95 different countries. The top five countries of origin are India (29 per cent), Nigeria (10 per cent), China (5 per cent), Iran (4 per cent) and South Korea (4 per cent). The distribution of CPVMNW participants by country of origin resembles that of the recent general visible minority newcomer population in Canada.²¹ Overall, the most common regions of origin are Southern Asia (40 per cent) and Africa (28 per cent). A high proportion of participants in Models 1, 2, and 3 are from these two regions, whereas participants in Model 4 are from either the Middle East (86 per cent) or Africa (14 per cent). In terms of regions of origin, there was

¹⁸ Only one program participant did not complete the baseline survey.

¹⁹ Twelve months for Model 1; nine months for Model 2; 13 months for Model 3; 22 months for Model 4.

²⁰ Almost three-quarters of all participants (74 per cent) arrived in Canada in 2018 or later.

²¹ See <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/t002b-eng.htm>

more diversity among participants in Model 2 (48 per cent from South Asia, 18 per cent from Africa, 14 per cent from East Asia, 11 per cent from the Middle East, 8 per cent from Latin America & the Caribbean, and 1 per cent from Europe).

Table 10 presents a summary of selected sociodemographic and employment characteristics of program participants. We further examine these and other characteristics in more detail below.

Table 10 Baseline characteristics of program participants

	All	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age (average in years)	36.4	38.3	35.9	36.3	38.0
Married or common-law (%)	78	69	83	71	78
Number of children at home (average)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.3
Number of adults at home (average)	2.1	2.5	2.2	1.9	2.0
Paid work experience in Canada (%)	45	57	40	49	47
Paid work experience outside Canada (%)	92	76	95	97	78
Currently working (%)	19	21	16	23	35
Completed any formal education in Canada (%)	10	12	7	19	2
Currently studying (%)	9	10	6	15	7
Receiving Provincial Income Assistance (%)	14	16	8	18	48
Total number of participants	836	115	468	207	46

Marital status and household composition

More than three-quarters of participants are married or in a common-law relationship (78 per cent). Fifty-eight per cent of participants have at least one child living with them and 31 per cent of participants are living with children under five years of age. A typical CPVMNW participant is married with an employed spouse and one child between the ages of 6 and 17.

Language

The most frequently spoken language at home is English (36 per cent), followed by Arabic (10 per cent), French (9 per cent), and, with 5 per cent or less each, Hindi, Punjabi, Mandarin, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, and other languages. The proportion of participants speaking English or French at home is noticeably higher for women in Model 3 (60 per cent)²² and lowest (18 per cent) for women in Model 4.

Since most service providers chose to specify a minimum **Canadian Language Benchmark** eligibility requirement of at least 4, almost all women reported being able to conduct a conversation in English or in French (99.5 per cent). Of the 11 interventions, 10 were offered in English, and, thus, almost all women in Models 1, 2, and 4 can speak English well enough to conduct a conversation. However, most were unable to do so in French. Thirty-eight per cent of women in Model 3, which includes French-speaking SÉO participants, reported proficiency in carrying out a conversation in both English and French.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) describe 12 levels of ability in four primary language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. These CLB levels describe, measure, and recognize the second language proficiency of newcomers. A separate benchmark is assessed for each language skill. Benchmarks 1 to 4 cover basic language ability, 5 to 8 cover intermediate and 9 to 12 cover advanced. <https://www.clb-osa.ca/benchmarks/overview>

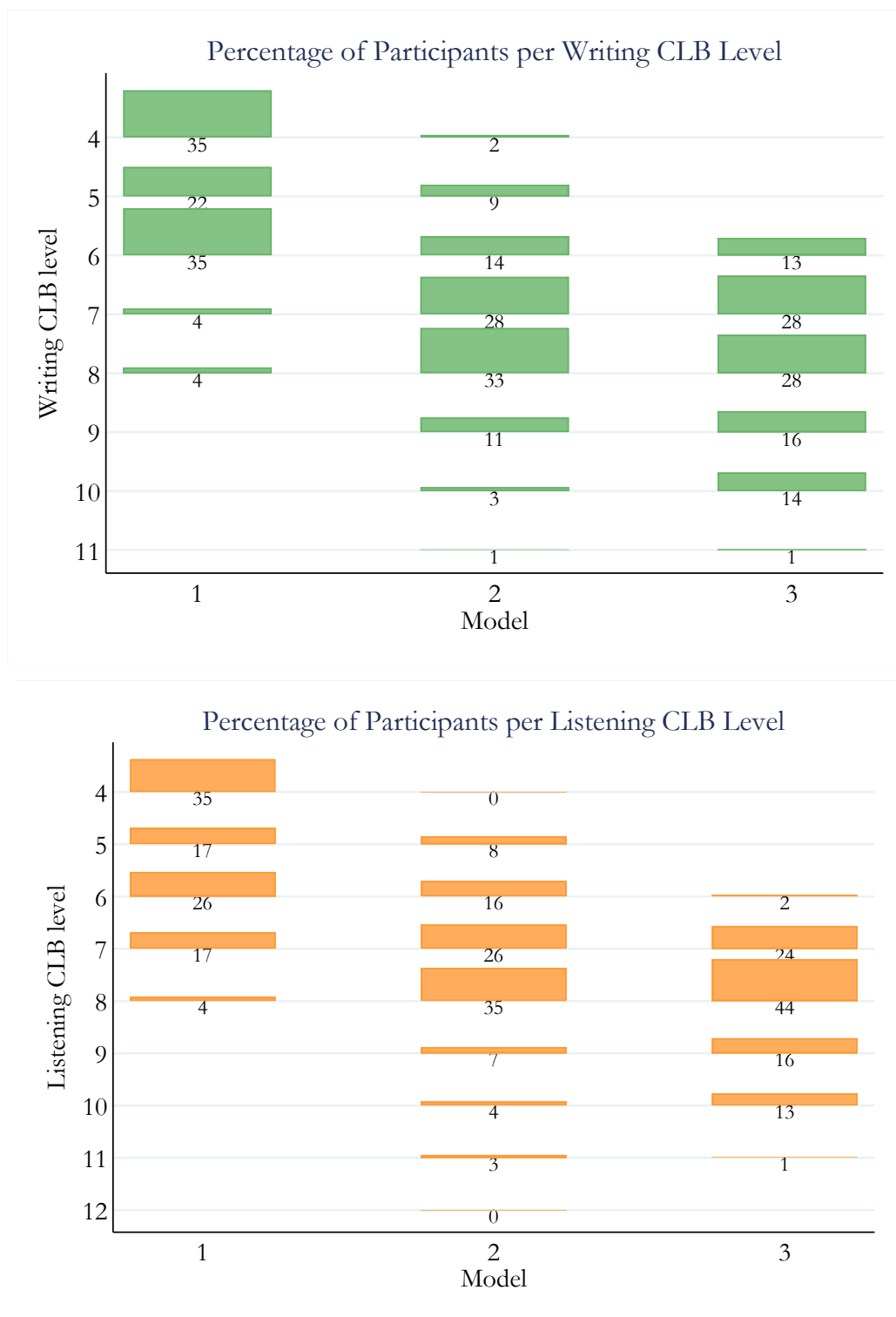
The average CLB level among all participants is 7.5 for Reading, Listening, and Speaking and 7.3 for Writing. The figures below show the variation in the CLB levels across models²³ in each of the language skill areas: Writing, Reading, Listening, and Speaking. The numbers under each bar represent the percentage of participants in each CLB level. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100 per cent. All figures show a similar pattern. Model 1 participants have the lowest English language skills, followed by participants in Model 2 and participants of Model 3,²⁴ respectively. While the distributions of CLB levels overlap for all skills across models, the level of most Model 1 participants ranges from 4 to 6, whereas this range is from 7 to 8 for Model 2, and from 7 to 10 for Model 3. These levels are in line with the eligibility requirements of each of the models and the participant targeting for each model in terms of distance from the labour market.

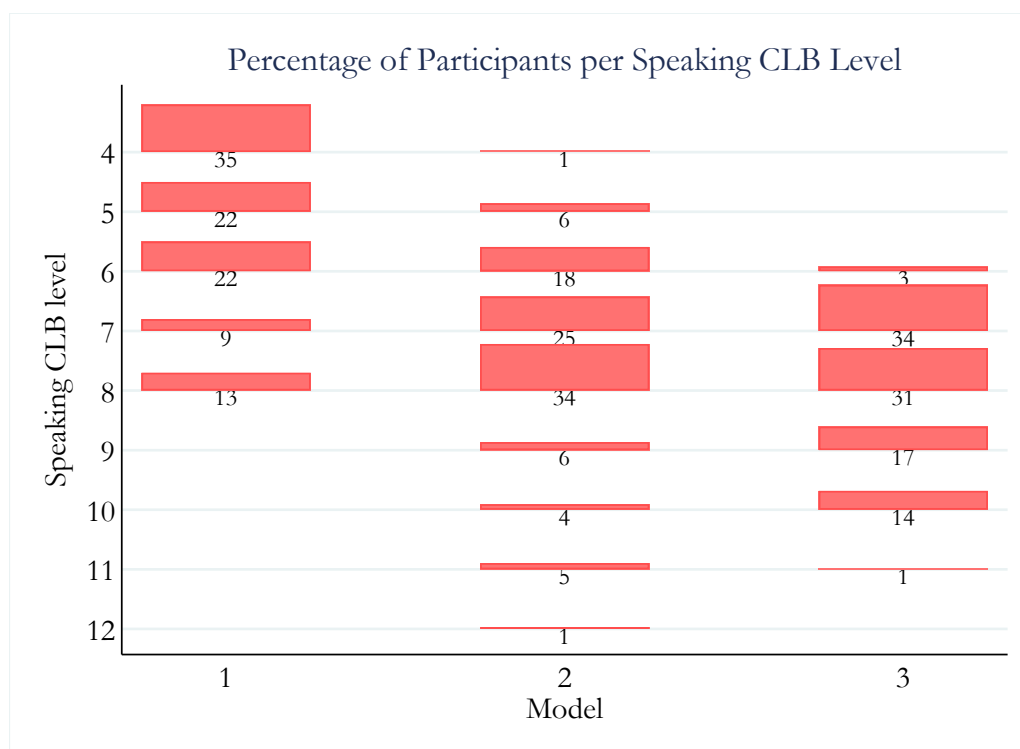
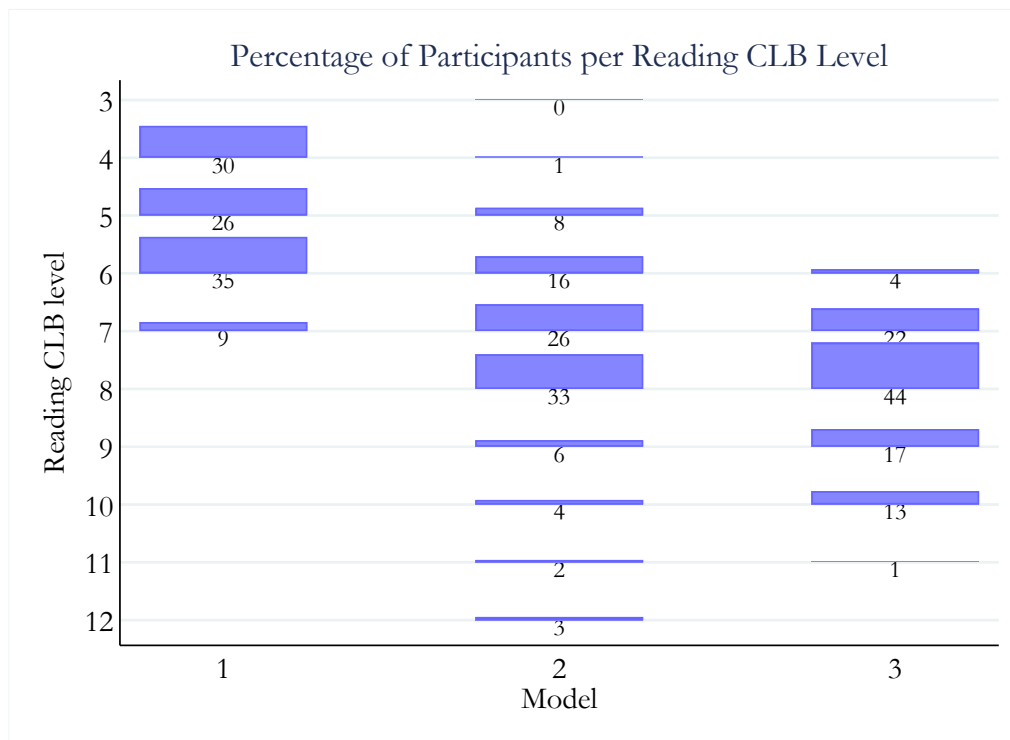
²² Almost three-quarters of SÉO participants (in Model 3) speak French at home (74 per cent).

²³ The figures do not include CLB data from OFE (Model 1), SÉO (Model 3), and the YWCA (Model 4) because a minimum CLB level was not a requirement for eligibility, and thus was not collected.

²⁴ Only includes World Skills Model 3 participants.

Figure 2 Participants CLB levels in all skill areas by model





Notes: Figures do not include data from OFE (Model 1), SÉO (Model 3), and the YWCA (Model 4). The numbers under each bar represent the percentage of participants in each CLB level. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100 per cent.

Education

Most CPVMNW participants are highly educated with 90 per cent having a university degree from outside of Canada. Women in Models 2 and 3 have even higher credentials: 52 per cent of Model 2 participants and 57 per cent of Model 3 participants have a master's degree or higher obtained outside Canada while 43 per cent of Model 2 participants and 34 per cent of Model 3 participants have a bachelor's degree.

One in ten participants completed some formal education in Canada. This share is larger for Model 3 (19 per cent) and Model 1 (12 per cent) and lower for women in Models 2 (7 per cent) and 4 (2 per cent). Of those who reported completing some formal education in Canada, 28 per cent enrolled in a trade/vocational or apprenticeship diploma or certificate, followed by 12 per cent in a master's degree or higher, 10 per cent in a community (two year) college, and 9 per cent in a bachelor's degree.

Nine per cent of participants reported studying towards a degree, diploma, or certificate at the time of the baseline survey. This rate varies across models with the fewest (6 per cent) in Model 2 and the most (14 per cent) in Model 3. Of those currently studying, 26 per cent of women are currently studying for a trade/vocational or apprenticeship diploma or certificate, followed by master's degree or higher (24 per cent), bachelor's degree (22 per cent), community college (15 per cent), and high school diploma (10 per cent).

Participants in all models reported valuing learning for improving their chances of getting a better job and having more confidence. When we analyzed responses to a receptivity of continuous learning psychosocial scale,²⁵ 81 per cent of all participants agreed or strongly agreed that they are more likely to get a better job if they did some learning. Furthermore, 93 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that learning new things would make them more confident. However, 43 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that getting qualifications took too much effort.²⁶ As most of the respondents are adults who have completed university degrees and have children at home, it is not surprising that the time, effort, and cost of getting new qualifications are perceived as high.

²⁵ The receptivity to continuous learning scale measures a key pre-condition enabling the attainment of education and employment goals. It has been shown to be an important precursor predicting or supporting participants' subsequent employment achievements.

²⁶ This rate is particularly high for Model 4 participants with 59 per cent of women agreeing or strongly agreeing that getting a degree is too much effort.

Skills

Essential skills assessments

Essential skills are a specific set of skills that provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better prepare for the labour market: getting and keeping a job and adapting and succeeding at work.²⁷ As noted earlier, Model 2 applies the essential skills framework developed by the Government of Canada. As such, Model 2 CPVMNW participants completed online essential skills assessments created by the Essential Skills Group²⁸ both before joining the program, to measure their initial skills levels, and afterwards, thereby enabling the measurement of skills gains. Model 4 participants also completed one essential skills assessment before and after the program. In this report, we summarize the results of the baseline assessments.

Participants in Model 2 programs (offered by ACCES, Achēv, ISANS, World Skills, and the YWCA) completed online assessments in four essential skills: Document Use, Numeracy, Digital Skills, and Listening Skills. The service provider partners selected skills for assessment that are aligned with their curriculum and, therefore, participants in Model 4 completed only the listening assessment.

Table 11 reports the average score for the four essential skills measured at baseline by service provider. Each essential skill is measured using a 500-point scale which is subdivided into a scale ranging from 1 (basic) to 5 (advanced).²⁹ The listening and digital essential skills assessments used for this study assess skills levels 1–4 only, while the assessments of document use and numeracy assess the full 1–5 skills range. Compared to the other Model 2 service providers, the average scores for ACCES participants are the highest across all four essential skills. The average scores for the other Model 2 service provider participants are similar for all skills, while the YWCA Model 4 has a lower average listening score, the only essential skills measured by the YWCA Model 4.

²⁷ See the following link for more details on the work of the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (ESDC): <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/literacy-essential-skills.html>

²⁸ <https://www.essentialskillsgroup.com/>

²⁹ Level 1: 0–225, Level 2: 226–275, Level 3: 276–325, Level 4: 326–375, and Level 5: 376–500. In Figure 3 below, we also subdivide level 1 into lower level 1: 0–199 and upper level 1: 200–225.

Table 11 **Average essential skills assessment scores at baseline by service provider**

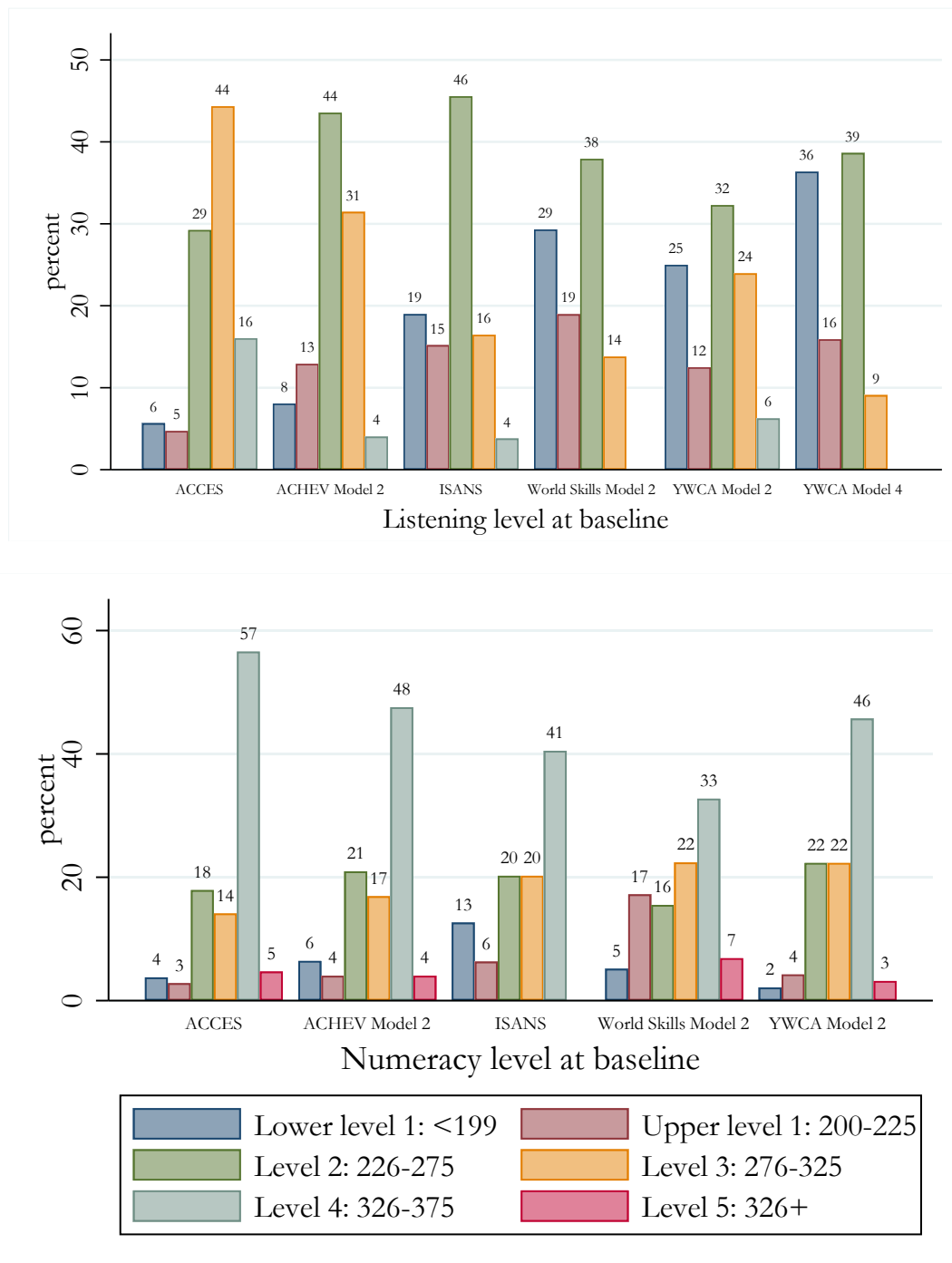
Essential Skills	Model 2				Model 4	
	ACCES	ISANS	ACHÈV	World Skills	YWCA	YWCA
Numeracy	320	291	308	296	311	
Listening	279	240	260	227	243	218
Digital skills	309	281	294	280	289	
Document use	280	257	269	263	268	
Total number of participants	106	79	124	58	96	44

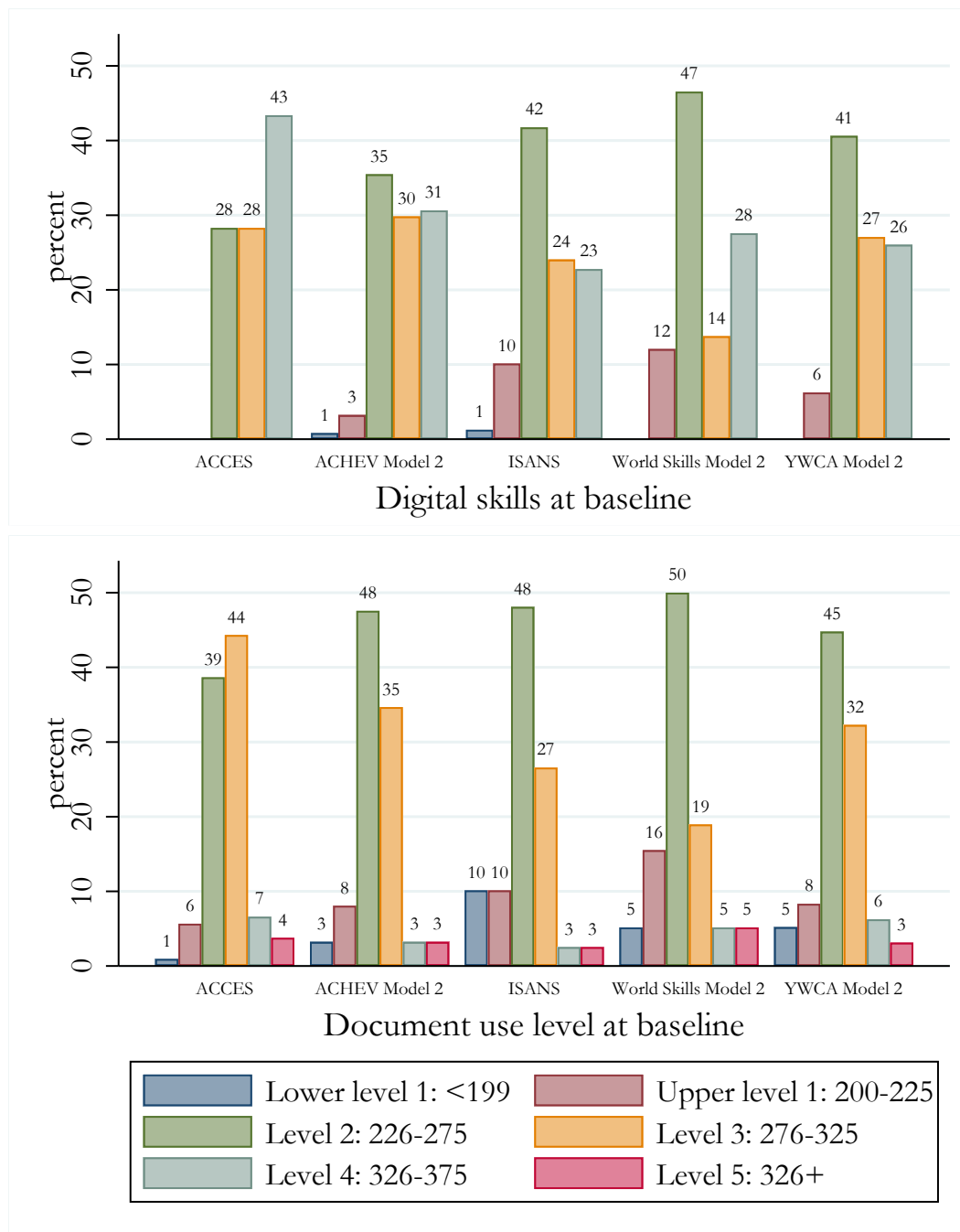
The average scores alone do not provide a full picture of the essential skills levels of participants. Figure 3 below presents the distributions of the levels of proficiency in Numeracy, Listening, Digital Skills and Document Use for participants from each service provider at baseline. The majority of participants from all service provider organizations implementing Models 2 and 4 have baseline document use scores at levels 2 or 3, but up to 21 per cent have scores at level 1. In comparison to document use, a smaller share of participants have scores at level 1 and a greater share have scores at level 4 for the other three essential skills assessed at baseline.

Sixty per cent of ACCES participants have scores at levels 3 or 4 in listening. Apart from ACCES and Achēv, the share of women with scores at lower level 1 in listening is large, ranging from 19 per cent for ISANS to 36 per cent for the YWCA 4. Conversely, a small share of women have level 4 scores in listening skills, except for participants from ACCES. This finding is unsurprising given that English is not the mother tongue of most participants. Fifty-six per cent of participants speak neither French nor English at home and 50 per cent have been in Canada for 11 months or less.

Numeracy skill levels are higher than those of the other essential skills assessed as part of the pilot. Level 4 is the most common level for participants from all four service provider organizations and three-quarters of women have scores at level 2 or above. The high numeracy skill level of participants is likely related to their high education levels.

Figure 3 Percentage distributions of essential skills proficiency levels for participants at baseline

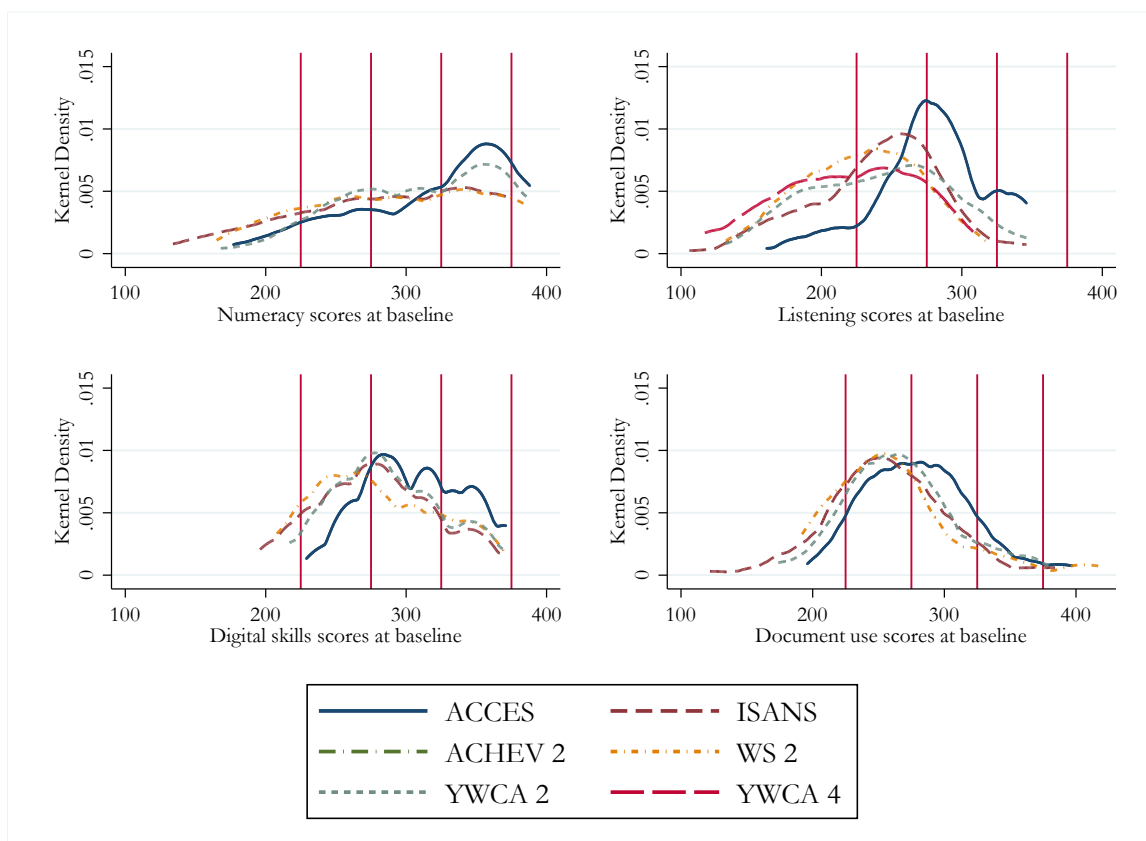




Instead of looking at the distribution of essential skills levels, as in the histograms presented in Figure 3, the variability in the scores themselves (which range from 0–500) can be summarized in a figure illustrating densities of the scores (Figure 4). This depicts the variations within the levels themselves, which are not captured when looking only at differences across levels. As can

be seen below, Document Use scores are very similar across all service provider organizations, except for participants from ACCES who have a higher percentage of participants with higher scores. The distributions of Digital Skills scores vary a little more across service providers, but is still quite similar. There is greater variation in the Listening scores, however, and the distribution of Numeracy scores reflects the higher percentage of participants with higher scores and a higher variance in numeracy skills among participants within each service provider.

Figure 4 Kernel densities of essential skills assessment scores at baseline



Note: The red vertical lines indicate the score cut-offs between levels 1-4.

Math and literacy skills

In addition to the essential skills assessments, the baseline survey also inquired about self-reported skills. These survey questions were also answered by participants in Models 1 and 3 who did not complete the essential skills assessments. Participants were asked how often they use essential skills in their daily life outside of work. Given that using and practicing skills enhances them, this self-reported measure of use is a proxy for skills levels. A majority of

participants reported using math every day (32 per cent) or a few times a week (30 per cent). Around 80 per cent of participants in Models 1, 2, and 3 and 66 per cent in Model 4 reported reading or using information from English books every day or few times a week. When asked about writing notes, letters, or emails in English, the share of participants who reported writing every day or a few times a week varied across models with 94 per cent of participants in Model 3, 84 per cent in Model 2, 78 per cent in Model 1, and 63 per cent in Model 4. The share of participants reporting using the Internet daily to access websites in English ranged from 65 per cent in Model 4 to 88 per cent in Model 3 (80 per cent in Model 2 and 73 per cent in Model 1). While the use of math skills is lower in comparison to the use of literacy skills, it is frequently used for many participants.

Oral communication skills

The baseline survey also asked participants about their confidence using oral communication skills in English. We calculated an English oral communication score for each participant based on their self-reported levels of confidence in successfully completing different activities involving language and oral communication.³⁰ The score is calculated as the average of ten Likert (or rating) scale questions ranging from 1 to 5. The closer the score is to 1, the higher the participant's confidence in oral communication skills. Based on average and median scores, presented in Table 12, we found that participants reported fairly high levels of confidence in their English oral communication skills. Participants in Model 3 reported having the highest oral communication skill level, followed by women in Models 2, 1, and 4. These differences across participants from the different models are in line with the differences in CLB Speaking levels and the model recruitment targeting described earlier.

Table 12 Average and median English oral communication scores by model

	All	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Average score	1.79	1.88	1.88	1.46	2.23
Median score	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.2	2.3
Number of participants	834	115	466	207	46

³⁰ The questions ask participants about their confidence completing the following activities in English: "Ask questions to get information"; "Give instructions to other people"; "Explain facts to other people"; "Follow spoken instructions"; "Listen to other people without interrupting"; "Use appropriate body language while having a conversation"; "Speak with other people to plan activities or solve problems"; "Express my opinions and ideas clearly"; "Give a brief presentation to a small group"; and "Give feedback or advice that helps other people".

Employment

The pilot project interventions' primary goal is to help visible minority newcomer women in their integration with the labour market. It is targeted towards unemployed or underemployed women both with and without Canadian work experience. Most participants, however, did have work experience outside of Canada. Almost all women who participated in Model 2 (95 per cent) and Model 3 (97 per cent) had paid work experience outside of Canada, in contrast with 76 and 78 per cent of participants in Models 1 and 4, respectively.

Women without Canadian work experience are considered to be further from the labour market and, therefore, whether a participant has Canadian work experience helps to determine the appropriateness of the four models for a potential client. Forty-five per cent of all participants reported having had paid work experience in Canada (57 per cent in Model 1, 40 per cent in Model 2, 49 per cent in model 3, and 47 per cent in model 4). Just under one-fifth of participants reported working or being self-employed at the time of the baseline survey. This share is the largest for women in Model 4 (35 per cent) and the lowest for women in Model 2 (16 per cent). Of those who were working at baseline, about half of them reported working part-time (less than 30 hours a week). These findings suggest an important number of underemployed women participating in the pilot.

For participants who reported being out of work, 70 per cent had not been working for one year or less, while 18 per cent had been out of work for 1 to 3 years prior to completing the baseline survey. Around 90 per cent of women in Models 1, 2, and 3 had been out of work for three years or less. For Model 4, this figure was 65 per cent, while 27 per cent of Model 4 participants had been unemployed for more than three years and 8 per cent had never worked prior to joining the project.³¹ Of participants who were not working at the time of the baseline survey, 36 per cent had previously had paid work experience in Canada.

In the 12 months prior to the baseline survey, 11 per cent of participants had not been looking for work. Of those who had looked for work, 80 per cent of participants reported experiencing difficulties in finding employment. 21 per cent of participants reported not knowing why they were having a hard time getting a job while 59 per cent of participants were able to identify one or more challenges.³² The three most common difficulties reported were: "My experience outside of Canada was not recognized or valued" (27 per cent); "I did not know anyone" (25 per cent); and "My education outside Canada was not recognized or valued (17 per cent). The job search difficulties are summarized in Table 13, and as this table illustrates, the proportion of women in

³¹ The number of years out of work may include time out of work before arriving in Canada.

³² Eighteen per cent of all participants reported one difficulty, 13 per cent reported two, and the remaining participants reported three or more difficulties in finding employment.

Model 4 reporting having experienced difficulties is substantially higher than participants in the three other models for most of the barriers.

In sum, most women had previously had paid work before arriving in Canada, but fewer than half had worked in Canada. In addition, 90 per cent of participants reported that their immediate family was somewhat supportive or very supportive of them having a job, and 81 per cent of participants indicated that that was also the case for their extended family. The majority of women were already looking for work before joining the pilot project and many had experienced multiple barriers to finding work. This is especially true for refugee women participating in Model 4. These findings suggest that participants were likely good candidates for the models as most were unemployed or underemployed, had already started their transition into the Canadian labour market in looking for work, but many were struggling and could, therefore, benefit from the CPVMNW programming.

Table 13 Job search difficulties experienced by participants and by model (%)

	All (%)	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (%)	Model 3 (%)	Model 4 (%)
I could not get a job because my experience outside of Canada was not recognized or valued	27	21	27	26	39
I could not get a job because I did not know anyone	25	15	28	24	24
I could not get a job because my education outside Canada was not recognized or valued	17	21	14	14	48
I could not get a job because I do not have enough skills	16	17	17	9	26
Job interviews were difficult for me because I do not know a lot about work in Canada	16	11	17	14	28
I did not know where to look for a job	14	13	14	14	22
I could not get a job because I don't have childcare	10	4	11	12	13
I could not get a job because employers were concerned about my English skills	9	7	10	6	28
I can't always get transportation	7	9	6	6	9
I do not have copies of my formal credentials	3	2	2	2	20
I was discriminated against because of my race	3	0	2	7	0
I could not get a job because I am caring for an adult	1	2	1	1	4
I was discriminated against because of my gender	1	0	1	4	0
Total number of participants	835	115	467	207	46

Note: Columns sum to more than 100% because participants were able to list multiple job search difficulties.

Labour market readiness

The CPVMNW aimed to improve the employment readiness of potential participants and each model was targeted towards women with different needs and levels of readiness. To measure the labour market readiness of program participants before beginning the programming, we used three scales: **Job Search Clarity (JSC)**,³³ **Job Search Self Efficacy (JSSE)**, and **Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)**.³⁵ For each of these scales, we created the average score of responses to the items in the scale. Each response to an item is a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The closer the score is to 5, the more prepared the participant is for the labour market. Overall, the average scores were above the mid-point (3) but still distant from the maximum attainable score, indicating room for improvement, which the programming may allow participants to achieve. The average scores of participants before joining the pilot were 3.5 for CSDMSE and JSC, and 3.1 for JSSE. Most scores vary between 2 and 4, which suggests that, in general, participants are neither entirely unprepared nor completely ready for the labour market at the time of the baseline survey.

The average scores do not vary very much across models and are presented in Table 14. However, for all scales, Models 1 and 3 participants have the highest average scores, followed by participants in Model 2, and Model 4. Relative to the other groups, women in Model 4 have lower levels of confidence in looking for work as measured by the JSSE scale. The fact that Model 1 participants appear to be more employment-ready than participants in Model 2 is somewhat surprising. However, Model 1 participants may have other barriers to employment that make them more distant to the labour market, including lower language levels as noted previously.

By taking a closer look at the distributions of the scores for each scale by model, presented in Figure 5, we find that, while the shapes of the distributions differ across models, it is striking how much they overlap. This indicates that participants in all models do not differ very much in

³³ Job search clarity assesses the clarity of the type of job and employer desired, and the job search goals.

³⁴ Job search self-efficacy assesses the belief that the individual can perform various job search tasks effectively. Source: 10-item scale from Zikic and Saks (2009) (Question 18) as well as Côté, Saks and Zikic (2006), Saks and Ashforth (1999, 2000), Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and van Ryn (1989), Kanfer and Hulin (1985) and Ellis and Taylor (1983). Measured on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=no confidence at all that they can accomplish the task and 5=complete confidence that they can accomplish the task.

³⁵ CDMSE assesses self-efficacy beliefs about an individual's ability to perform self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem solving. Source: 25-item scale, Taylor and Betz (1983). Taken from O'Brien (2003). Measured on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=no confidence at all that they can accomplish the task and 5=complete confidence that they can accomplish the task.

terms of their self-reported labour market readiness, especially in the context of differences we have noted earlier in their language and essential skills levels and other characteristics.

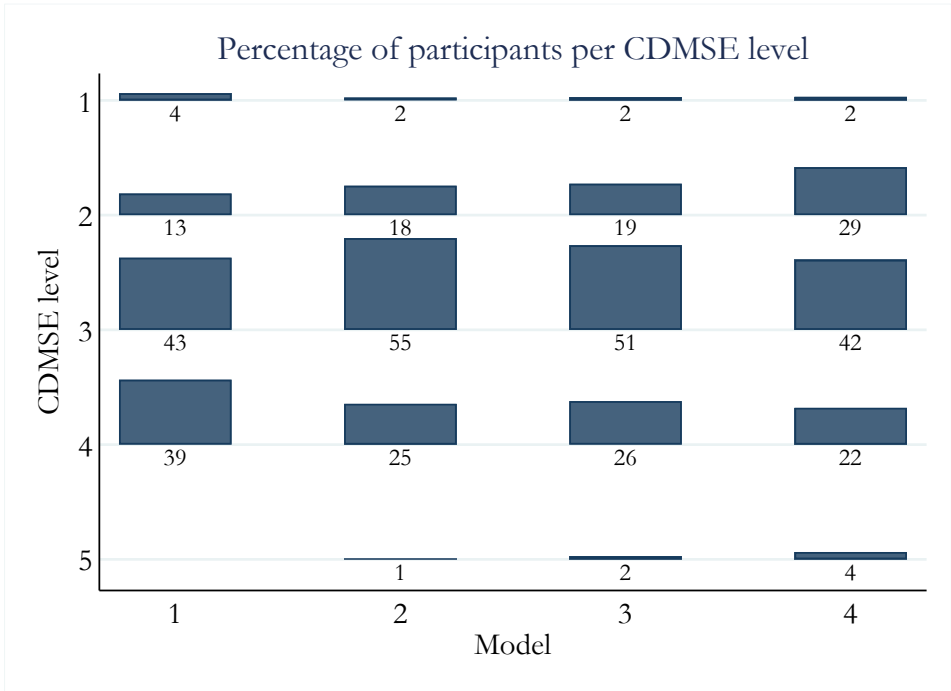
JSC assesses the clarity of the type of job and employer desired, and the job search goals. CDMSE assesses self-efficacy beliefs about an individual's ability to perform self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem solving. JSSE assesses beliefs that the individual can perform various job search tasks effectively.

Table 14 **Average baseline scores by model**

	All	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Career decision-making self-efficacy score	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.4
Job search clarity score	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.4
Job search self-efficacy score	3.1	3.4	3.1	3.2	2.9
Number of participants	840	115	468	211	46

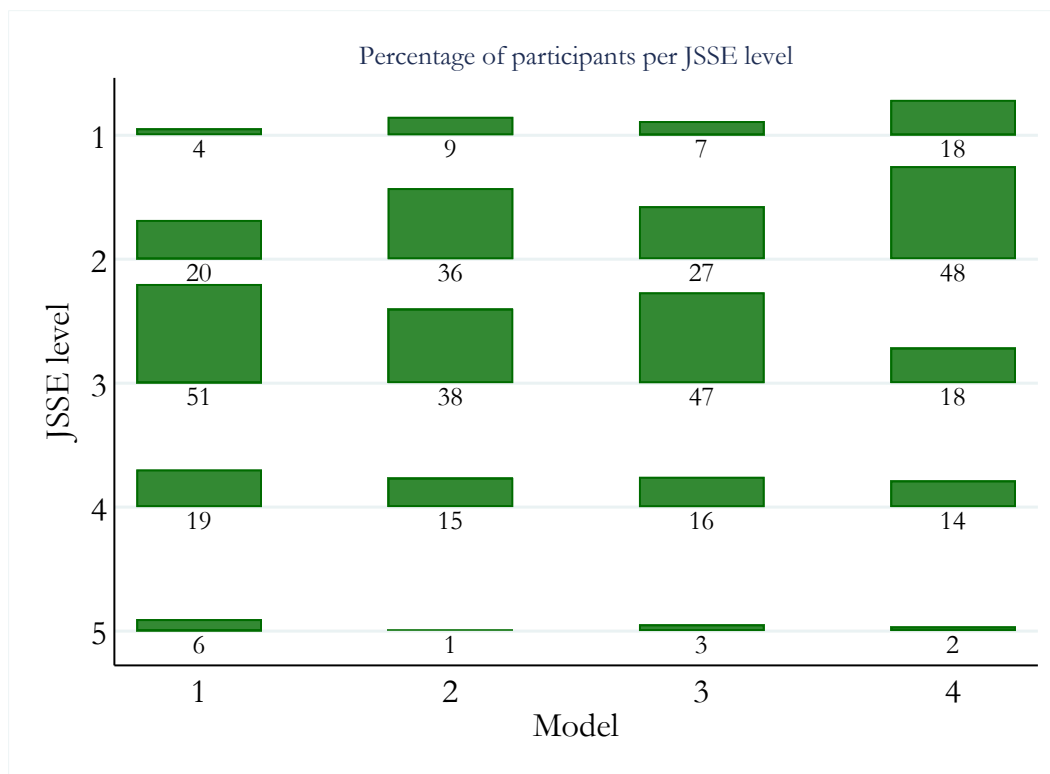
The distributions of the CDMSE and JSSE scores for Models 2 and 3 are strikingly similar with a large concentration in the middle of the score range. The distributions, for both the CDMSE and JSSE scores, for Models 1 and 4 are more dispersed with higher proportions of participants at the lower and higher ends of the scores, respectively. Under these two distinct metrics, the Model 1 participants show greater readiness for the labour market, followed by participants in Models 2 and 3, and, lastly, participants in Model 4.

Figure 5 Career decision-making self-efficacy levels by model



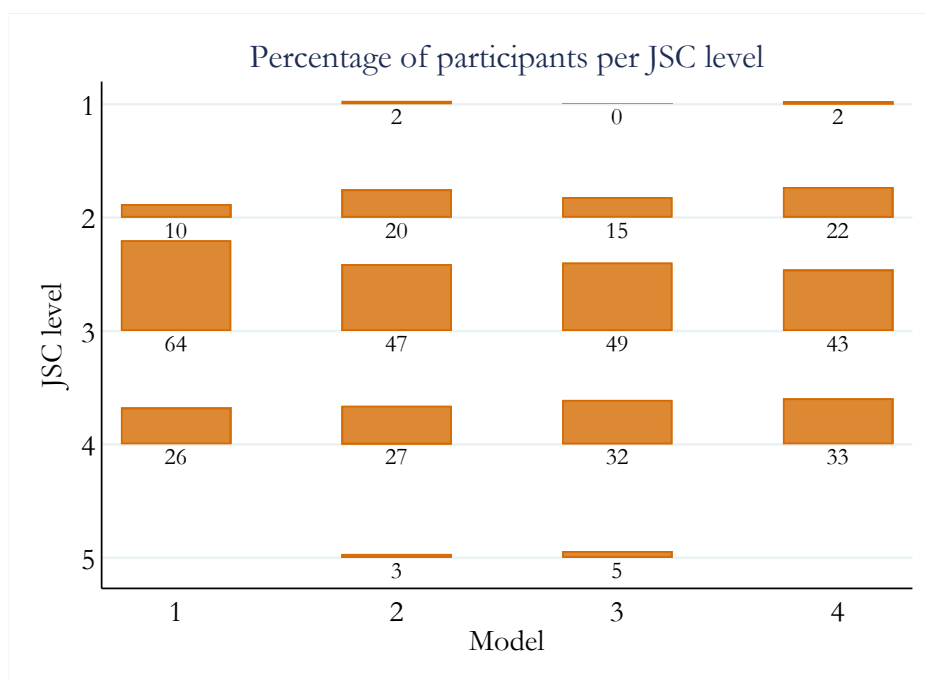
Notes: The numbers under each bar represent the percentage of participants at each CDMSE level. For example, someone with a score of between 1 and 2 would have a CDMSE score of 1 and someone with a score between 2 and 3 would have a score of 2, and so on. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100%.

Figure 6 Job search self-efficacy levels by model



Notes: The numbers under each bar represent the percentage of participants at each JSSE level. For example, someone with a score of between 1 and 2 would have a JSSE score of 1 and someone with a score between 2 and 3 would have a score of 2, and so on. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100 per cent.

The distributions of the job search clarity levels are almost identical for Models 2, 3, and 4. For Model 1 participants, while the average score is similar to the other models' averages at around 3.5, the distribution of the levels is more highly concentrated at level 3. This suggests that Model 1 is a more homogenous group when looking at their baseline job search clarity.

Figure 7 Job search clarity levels by model

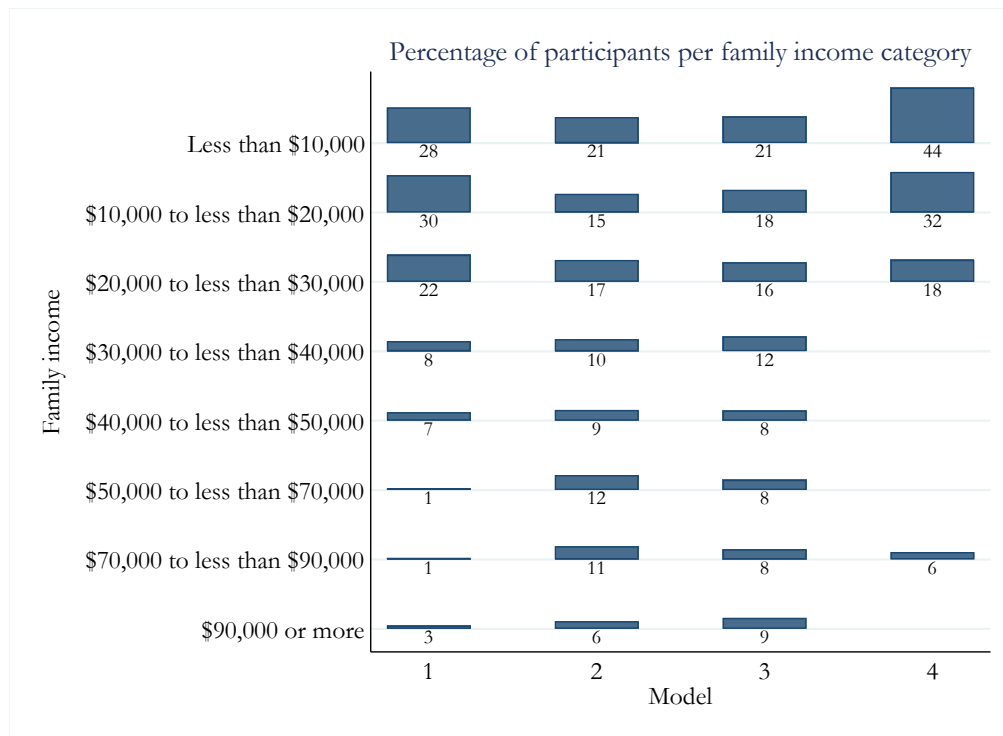
Notes: The numbers under each bar represent the percentage of participants at each JSC level. For example, someone with a score of between 1 and 2 would have a JSC score of 1 and someone with a score between 2 and 3 would have a score of 2, and so on. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100 per cent.

Income and financial well-being

The figure below (Figure 8) shows how the distribution of family income varies across models. The numbers under each bar represent the percentage share of participants reporting being in each income category before joining the pilot. The sum of the percentages in each column totals 100 per cent. Model 4 participants reported having the lowest family income, followed by Model 1 participants. For both of these models, the family income distribution of participants is concentrated in the three lowest income categories which includes annual incomes of less than \$30,000.

Less than 20 per cent of women in Models 1, 2, and 3 received any type of provincial income assistance benefits in the 12 months preceding the baseline survey, compared to 46 per cent of Model 4 participants. Model 4 is intended for refugee women who are in receipt of social assistance. However, this 46 per cent of Model 4 participants is an underestimate of the percentage of participants receiving any social assistance as it does not include benefits refugees receive from the Resettlement Assistance Program.

Figure 8 Participants' family income by model



Hope

Newcomers to Canada come to Canada with hope for themselves and their family. Participants in all models expressed high hopes for the future. Indeed, 90 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I see myself as someone with a lot of hope for the future” (Figure 9). In addition, over 70 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they see themselves as people with high self-confidence (Figure 10). Women in Model 1 stand out with 83 per cent reporting having high self-confidence, in comparison to fewer women in the other models.

Figure 9 Participant agreement with the statement, “I see myself as someone who has a lot of hope for the future,” by model

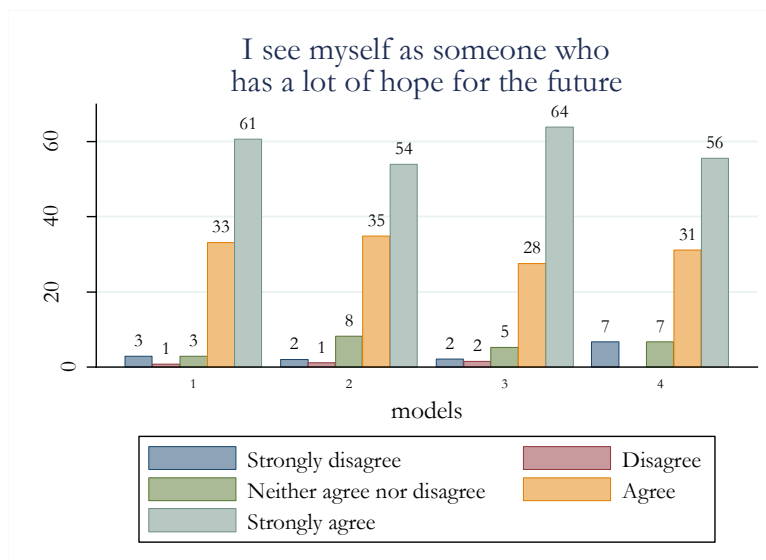
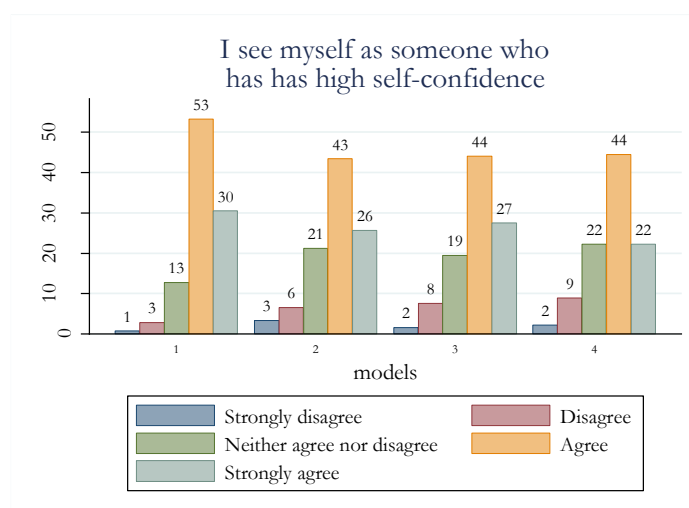


Figure 10 Participant agreement with the statement, “I see myself as someone who has high self-confidence,” by model



In this section, we summarized the sociodemographic, skill, and employment characteristics of the women who participated in the first year of the CPVMNW pilot project. Together, these baseline characteristics situate participants along the labour market continuum and show that, prior to joining the program, most participants faced some barriers to employment, including skills and language gaps, and job search and career decision-making challenges. The CPVMNW pilot programming aims to address these barriers and provide participants with the skills, resources, and networks to successfully integrate in the Canadian labour market.

IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS ACROSS INTERVENTIONS

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Overall, programs were implemented successfully with the targeted population. Many of the main program components were deemed useful and participants agreed that the programs met their needs. Service providers adapted quickly to online delivery due to the pandemic and the online format worked well for many participants. Targeted programming that brought together visible minority newcomer women was highlighted as successful in fostering a sense of belonging and kinship. Other program elements that were found to be particularly successful included individualized support, the milestones approach (Model 1), and the focus on essential skills in Model 2.

The program recruited the targeted population

All program sites recruited participants who identified as visible minority newcomer women, and who wanted to find employment in Canada. The program was delivered to women whose levels of skill ranged from low to high. Some participants had previously held employment in Canada before the start of the program, while others had no work experience in Canada. Service providers offered training in various topics, as well as essential skills training, and employer engagement. Adaptations were made to transfer the program to an online delivery format during the pandemic, which is further described in the following sections.

Programs were of value to participants, both in terms of the usefulness of program activities and in meeting participants' needs

Overall, the programs were seen as useful and met the needs of participants. The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they found most of the main activities in their program useful.³⁶ Table 15 below shows participants' assessments of activities in their program; the activities are listed in order of usefulness according to respondents' assessments. Eighty per cent or more of participants in all models agreed or strongly agreed that "in-class / virtual training / workshops," "career development services," and "1-on-1 support from staff" were

³⁶ This was asked in the first follow-up survey administered after the program activities were completed, which is generally around three to four months after the baseline survey depending on the program duration.

useful activities. “Workplace training” (for Model 1), “building essential skills portfolio” and “developing essential skills” (for Models 2 and 4) were also rated highly. Most other program activities were rated as useful by at least 70 per cent of participants in each model, with the exceptions of “peer support” (67 per cent of Model 1 participants), and “on-the-job support” (61 and 63 per cent for women in Models 2 and 3, respectively).

Table 15 Participants’ assessments of the usefulness of program activities

Program activities	All (%)	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (%)	Model 3 (%)	Model 4 (%)
In-class / virtual training / workshops	90	89	90	90	100
Workplace training	90	90			
Career development services	89	92	89	89	91
1-on-1 support from staff	87	84	87	88	91
Building your essential skills portfolio	86		86		
Developing your essential skills	83		82		91
Mentoring	81	87	79	82	91
Peer support	80	67	84	77	82
Support in finding job opportunities	79	88	73	88	91
Networking events	74	72	71	81	73
Work placement	72	70			82
On-the-job support	64	74	61	63	73
Total number of participants	372	50	225	86	11

Note: Percentages reported correspond to the share of participants who agree or strongly agree that the activity was useful.

In the interviews and the focus groups, program staff and participants highlighted various components of the program they perceived as useful. Staff in the 11 interventions emphasized the usefulness of learning how to write resumes and cover letters that matched the Canadian labour market, as well as learning how to effectively interview for jobs. Other topics program staff and participants found particularly useful in reaching participants’ employment goals according to each model, include:

- Model 1: Creating vision boards and action plans; learning about workplace vocabularies, workplace safety, employees' rights, and workplace harassment; occupation-specific training

"... one of the best training was direct support worker's training day because it gives me an edge in all the interview I've been taking. But because I don't have this experience as a direct support worker from my country, is not even my field but because of the training, it gives me something like confidence to be able to maneuver even in the labour market and to be able to speak and to be able to perform very well in most of my direct support worker interview." (Model 1 participant)

- Model 2: Creating actions plans; cold calling/emailing; mock interviews; writing in Confidence Journals; learning how to prepare an elevator pitch; self-leadership series
- Model 3: Cold calling/emailing; mock interviews

"Another significant part of the program, in my view, was the cold calls. Coming from a culture where we know that no one at any company will ever stop to talk to you, every rule has its exceptions, is very enlightening." (Model 3 participant)

- Model 4: STAR interview technique practiced in mock interviews

Participants shared that they benefitted from learning about the Canadian workplace culture and environment, as the work environment in participants' home countries was vastly different. Participants felt more prepared to navigate the Canadian labour market after the completion of the program.

Workshop sessions about Conflict Management, Work Ethics, or Diversity and Inclusion also worked well, particularly for Models 1 and 2, as observed by program staff. The value of these workshops is explained by this program staff member, *"... really opened up for great dialogue with many of our participants who never worked in such a diverse culture and work setting before. So it gives them a real chance in a safe space, ask questions and learn about what's appropriate, what's not appropriate, and kind of challenge some of their assumptions about diversity or some of their just comfort in a really wonderful way."*

The program was satisfactory and met participant needs

Figures 11 and 12 show participants' reported satisfaction levels with the program and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Of the 378 program participants who had responded to the first follow-up survey as of September 30, 2020, the vast majority (95 per cent) reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their experience in the program. While overall

satisfaction with the programs was high, participants in Models 2 and 3 expressed higher levels of satisfaction in comparison to individuals in Models 1 and 4.

Given the high levels of satisfaction, 53 per cent of the participants indicated that they have already recommended the program to other newcomer women and 39 per cent responded they are very likely to recommend it. Over 90 per cent of participants in Models 1, 2, and 3 have already recommended or are very likely to recommend the program. The models where participants expressed higher satisfaction levels were also the ones where they are more likely to recommend the program. While 9 per cent of Model 4 participants reported being very dissatisfied with the program, no participants responded that they would not recommend the program.

Figure 11 Program satisfaction by model

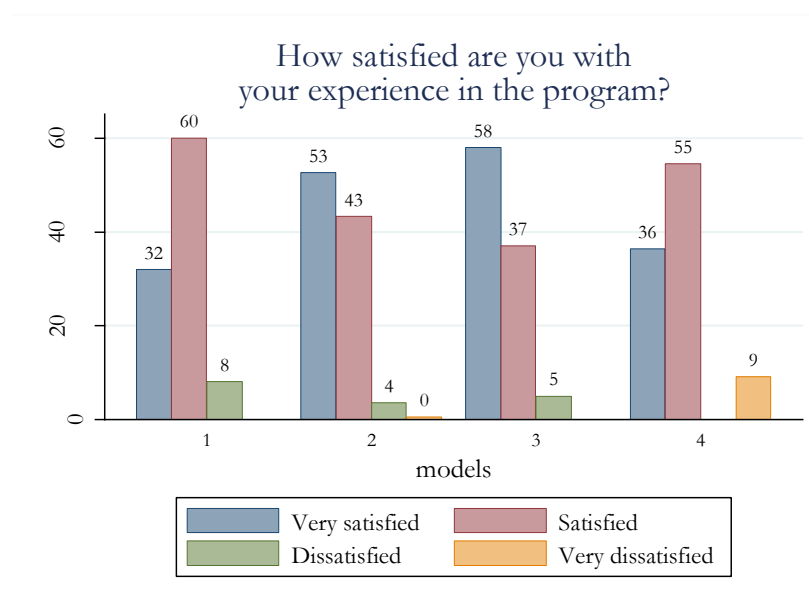
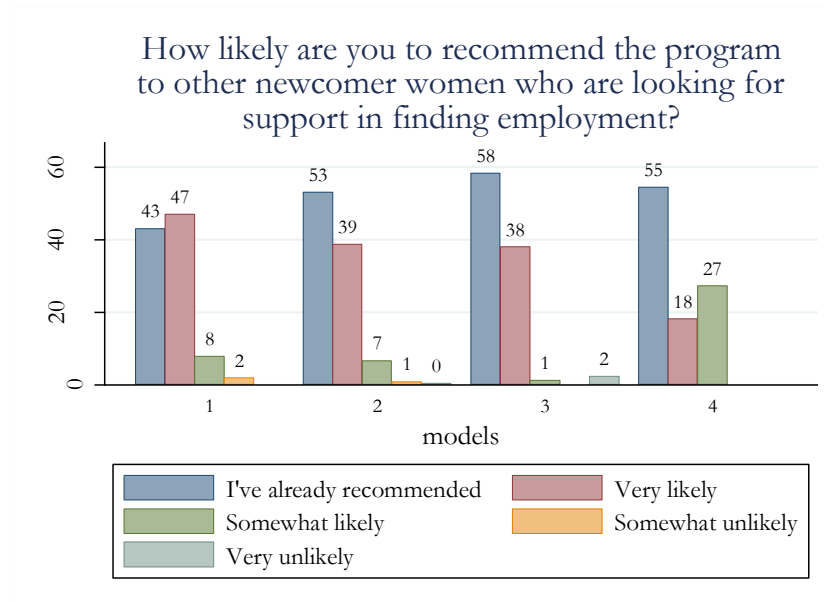


Figure 12 Likelihood of recommending the program to other newcomer women by model



In addition to participants being satisfied with the program, program staff shared that, for the most part, the program met the needs of participants. This was echoed by participants in the focus groups. Staff shared that they observed that women benefited from learning to write and improve resumes and cover letters, particularly learning to adapt resumes for a specific job, as well as improving communication skills and building in employer connections by networking. Participants learned to interview for jobs effectively, which improved their confidence in answering questions during interviews. Learning these skills helped participants reach their employment goals. One participant explained the value of improving their interview skills, “... and the interviewing tips, the informational interview techniques that they have shared and taught us, really has helped me. It actually chiseled my thinking and how I should put in and portray myself” (Model 2 participant). Some participants had mentors in their industry of interest, which was of value to participants, because participants could obtain industry-specific information, and expand their networks. Some participants were able to obtain employment in their field of interest, which was one of the main goals for many program participants. For those participants who found employment but not in their primary field of interest, participants still benefitted as they felt the job was a stepping-stone to reaching their employment goals.

“And we can able to ask direct questions about our field. And also she said they send the resume to me and they can keep me in touch. And also great because you can interact them, ask questions and answer, and they can see your face.”
(Model 2 participant)

The program also fit well within participants' daily schedules, as participants expressed their multiple roles within the home. The program also allowed participants to develop a routine and keep productive, especially during the pandemic, when they could focus on their employment goals.

“And I think the program itself, it keeps me accountable that I have to do it every day as much as I can according with my abilities to power studying for the course and not just applying for jobs, but applying and searching for the position and learning about the companies and knowing the background of the companies we can fit in, and networking with people.” (Model 3 participant)

Sites quickly adapted their programs for online delivery

Most service providers had already started delivering their programs in person prior to the pandemic. When pandemic-related measures were enacted in March 2020, program staff quickly adapted their in-person programs for online delivery. Over the course of 2020, all programs shifted to online delivery,³⁷ and program staff worked to continuously adapt to the new model. Staff identified Zoom as the best option for delivering the program online, in particular because of the breakout room feature. Some of the examples of adapting the program online included: providing one-on-one counselling sessions over Zoom, changing employer visits to cold calling or messaging employers through LinkedIn, and developing creative ways for participants to engage with employers, such as virtual employer panels.

Sites emphasized that already having a strong curriculum in place before moving to online delivery of the program was integral to the transition. As explained by a Model 2 staff member, *“So, bedrock is always having a strong curriculum plan. Without that, you can't go online.”* Other strategies for the online transition included listening to participant feedback to make the training and workshop sessions as interactive as possible. Service providers were also in communication with each other about the different platforms they were using, the challenges they were facing and how they were overcoming them.

³⁷ While all service provider organizations transitioned to online delivery, OFE continued to offer in-person services in addition to offering online services.

The encouraging and individualized support was one of the most appreciated aspects of the program. However, participants recommended increased support post-program

Program staff and participants identified one-on-one support and post-program follow-up support to be a very useful component of the program, especially in improving resumes and cover letters for a specific position/intended occupation, and in supporting the job search process. The one-on-one support worked particularly well during the pandemic, because participants needed flexibility to manage both participation in the program and their family responsibilities. Some service providers developed follow-up support activities, such as Meaningful Conversations in Model 2, where women from different cohorts could come together. These activities worked well, because it provided participants with a “sense of emotional security,” as described by one program staff member.

Participants across all four models appreciated the support and encouragement they received from the program staff, such as motivating participants to feel confident, showing interest in participants’ daily lives, or asking participants about their job search and interview process. As one participant noted, the support was helpful in moving forward: *“They always push us to be empowered like, let’s go girls, don’t give up, stay strong, stay motivated, and in the end, everyone will find a job and then everybody will be set up here.”* The support therefore was not only successful in connecting participants to employers and specialists but also in making them feel cared about. Program staff highlighted that *“passion, enthusiasm, determination and commitment”* were essential for program success.

Although participants valued individualized support and follow-up support after the program had ended, they suggested that more of these supports be incorporated. While some programs did offer supports post-program, participants noted that they would have liked more follow-up activities in the form of continued connections with staff until employment had been obtained or access to information about upcoming events and opportunities. Others suggested that post-program support include activities outside of work hours for those participants who had found employment and still wanted to be connected to the program.

Participating in the program online during the pandemic worked well for many participants

Although the program was not designed to be delivered virtually, it worked well for many participants, especially for those who had access to computer equipment and a reliable Internet connection, a quiet space to attend the workshops, the digital skills to navigate the virtual environment, and adequate English language levels.

Shifting to an online delivery mitigated some of challenges related to participation and recruitment, including childcare and transportation, which allowed some participants to attend and engage more fully with the program. Participants across all four models noted that they did not have to worry about finding or affording childcare, because they were able to care for their children while also participating in the program. Participating in the online program while taking care of children, however, was not without challenges, and this is explored further under the “What Were the Challenges?” section.

Additionally, the physical distance between participants’ homes and the delivery sites were no longer barriers to attending the program, because women with no access to cars or public transportation options, or those living far away, could now join the program. Program staff observed that this barrier was also removed when connecting with employers, as employers did not have to travel to program sites, and employers were more willing to participate in virtual engagement events.

Participants who were completing the program online improved their digital skills and learned how to efficiently work from home, allowing them to be familiar with and prepared for the current remote work environment adopted by many employers. The value of practicing working from home was explained by a participant, “... and to be very honest, the real work that we are doing now even is home-based. And it gave us that kind of practice to be in front of the screen for longer hours. So for me, it felt like, when I'm actually working now it feels like, oh okay, I've done this before.” Program staff observed that, surprisingly, participating in the program online did not hinder the connections participants made with each other. Many participants continued their discussions over Zoom after sessions had ended or created WhatsApp groups to continue conversations outside of the program. This facilitated the creation of relationships between women, and a supportive learning environment.

In order to increase participants’ engagement in the online delivery of the program, program staff observed that it was important to encourage participants to have their cameras on if possible, because seeing each other contributed to building stronger connections, and consequently to a stronger learning environment. Ensuring that participants had resources outside of the program, such as having a learning management system, particularly if they missed a session, was also noted to be important by program staff.

A program designed specifically for women was successful in making participants feel comfortable and like they belonged

As the program was designed specifically for newcomer women, and as most service providers delivered the program in cohorts, this intentionally brought the women together and allowed friendships to be formed. For some participants, meeting the women in the program was their

first time meeting like-minded people in Canada, and these relationships made integrating into Canada easier for participants. Program staff and participants observed that women felt comfortable learning and sharing personal stories and experiences with the other women and staff. Participants felt safe to share stories or ask questions they might not have otherwise shared in groups that also included men. Program staff further perceived that participants were able to give and receive emotional support from other women and from the program staff, which helped to reduce their feelings of isolation, particularly during the pandemic. As explained by a participant, “... we also had some sessions where there were heart to heart conversations with our mentors and the supervisors, wherein they shared their own personal experiences and stories which actually helped us and encouraging from a physiological need.”

Coming together as a group of women was of great support for the participants, because participants were able to “rediscover belief” in themselves, as participants gained hope and confidence in being able to find meaningful employment in Canada. It was also important to bring back successful women from previous cohorts to speak to participants, because “it affirms to the clients in the classroom that things are possible when you see another visible minority woman who has been through hell and back kind of find her way to the top and they are very vulnerable.”

Knowing and feeling that they were not the only ones struggling to find employment in Canada fostered feelings of belonging for the participants. Participants felt comfortable learning with other women whose needs were similar, namely focusing on building a network and building their professional lives, separate from their responsibilities in the home.

“Everyone’s in the same boat. And I think it allows them a place outside of their home and their family responsibilities and their relationships to really just be them and to focus on their professional life, to meet new friends, and express themselves in a way that is hard in the home because they’re so busy parenting...” (Model 2 program staff)

Staff were able to develop meaningful relationships with community partners

Program staff built meaningful relationships with organizations from local communities, which allowed these organizations to learn about the program, help meet the needs of participants, and support the recruitment of some participants. For example, some service providers partnered with local colleges to offer participants opportunities to attend bridging programs. Others partnered with institutes to help participants obtain certificates in an affordable manner. Service providers were also able to partner with community organizations to help participants and their families find food and other necessities.

In Model 1, the milestones approach supported the staff and women to understand the women's needs and goals

The milestones approach that was used by service providers implementing Model 1 helped participants develop personal and career goals to follow throughout the duration of the program. This approach also allowed program staff to assess the steps participants were taking in reaching their employment goals, address challenges participants faced in their work placements, and the improvements participants made throughout the program. Program staff observed that this approach created a “*positive pressure*” on the participants, as well as allowed participants to assess their goals and the steps they were taking to reach them.

For Model 2, a focus on essential skills helped participants to identify the skills they possessed

Many participants liked the focus on essential skills as it helped them to identify the skills they already possessed, how to transfer those skills to other jobs, and focus on what skills needed to be improved, which all contributed to increasing participants' confidence in themselves. A participant described how essential skills helped her to identify job opportunities to which she could apply: “*Before that program, I hadn't applied any job because I thought that I couldn't apply.*” Staff observed that essential skills training worked especially well for women who were looking to identify new skills they needed, or pre-existing skills they needed to enhance to help reach their employment goals.

The development of the essential skills portfolios also served as self-reflection exercises for some participants, which then helped them write targeted resumes. Participants were also able to receive supportive and constructive feedback from other women and program staff on their essential skills portfolio presentations. Essential skills portfolio presentations helped to develop participants' communication skills, which contributed to the growth in their confidence.

However, some participants in Model 2 did not find essential skills training or developing essential skills portfolios to be linked to reaching their employment goals. Some participants felt that the purpose of the essential skills training was not clear at the beginning of the program, and consequently, they were uncertain how to apply what they learned in developing resumes, cover letters, or job interviews. Moreover, some participants perceived that employers had no interest in seeing essential skills portfolios or felt that they did not fit the needs of their industries. However, program staff observed that participants underestimated the value of essential skills training because they believed they would easily find employment if they had strong technical skills.

Hearing the program delivery experiences of other service providers is useful, particularly with the transfer to online program delivery

SRDC established a community of practice to bring together CPVMNW service partners to learn from one another and share successes, challenges, and promising practices. Program staff have been in contact over email, phone or Zoom with staff from other program partners, and this communication has been helpful to get insight into how others have structured their online delivery of the program, what has been working well for participants, and what challenges they are facing. Some service providers adopted online program delivery or employer engagement strategies used by other service providers, and developed referral partnerships.³⁸ Hearing from other service providers helped program staff to understand that they were not alone in experiencing program delivery or recruitment challenges.

Program staff also enjoyed getting together in person or online with other program partners, as well as staff from IRCC and SRDC, because as explained by one program staff, *“I think it’s great because it validates what we’re already doing, like hearing from other people.”* Through these online forums, program staff learned different ways of collecting data and items to report. Particularly for programs that started the delivery later, staff in these newer programs were able to obtain tips, advice and knowledge from other service providers who had been delivering their programs for some time.

It was suggested by program staff to have more regular community of practice forums, particularly to share how COVID-19 has affected their delivery of the program, any changes being made, resources that could be shared with others, and how service providers are using their budgets.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND HOW WERE THEY ADDRESSED?

While overall implementation of the programs was successful, several challenges were raised — many, including challenges related to recruitment, due to the pandemic. The online format made it difficult for a subset of participants to take part in the programs, especially those with lower language and digital skills and those without the necessary computer equipment. There were also challenges in engaging with employers, especially for demand-led programs. Childcare and research components of the pilot also brought forward challenges.

³⁸ Participants can only take part in one CPVMNW intervention.

The pandemic has led to many challenges for participants, staff, and program delivery, especially in supporting participants in obtaining employment

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to program delivery challenges, particularly in supporting participants in finding employment, as well as personal challenges for participants and program staff. From the program delivery side, program staff indicated a shift with employment opportunities, including a reduction in the number of opportunities for participants, and difficulties in planning employment events or opportunities for the future. With the reduction of many employment opportunities, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, participants could not find job openings in their desired fields. Program staff worked to help participants find transitional employment opportunities so participants could at least have their first Canadian work experience, as well as build new skills and connections. Some participants who had found employment or work placement opportunities before the pandemic were no longer able to work after businesses closed and hiring freezes were put in place. Given that certain training components were only possible in-person, such as the cleaning industry two-week technical skills training, the number of participants who could participate decreased due to group gathering restrictions, and program staff had no choice but to reduce the number of participants in a cohort. Program staff worked to manage women's disappointment and frustration by trying to connect them to other organizations and employers.

Program staff observed the shift in participants' priorities from finding employment, to looking after their children and families, and keeping safe. Many participants had anxiety due to COVID-19, which prohibited them from fully engaging in the program, as explained by a Model 2 program staff member: *"... and when you have that other worry, your ability to focus on something else is going to be impacted."* Program staff worked to encourage participants and let them know that if they followed the COVID-19 guidelines, participants could stay safe and work. Program staff also saw that participants who completed the program no longer had regular contact with other participants or staff. This lack of contact meant participants were not using English as much as they did during the program when they speak with other participants and program staff. Participants' English language skills decreased, and consequently as explained by a Model 2 program staff member, *"being able to express themselves in an interview setting becomes a challenge"*.

For program staff, additional time and energy was required to support participants in navigating the online environment. Staff experienced stress due to the need to adapt the in-person delivery of the program, from the additional burden of supporting participants beyond employment needs to difficulties of separating work from home. Program managers addressed the burnout by providing flexibility to staff's work schedules. For the few service providers who returned to in-person delivery for a short period of time, new modifications had to be made, such as reducing the number of participants in the computer lab at one time, which required more time than expected to facilitate workshops, or complete research activities.

The online component of the program made it difficult for a subset of participants to participate fully

Participating in the program in an online format added challenges to a subset of participants, namely participants with lower language or digital skills, those without the necessary equipment or space, and those who had to take care of their children. While the barriers of finding childcare were reduced because participants could participate in the program at home, it was difficult to juggle family responsibilities while engaging in the program. Participants had a hard time concentrating or attending the program, as one participant explained the challenge of having *“one eye on the computer and the other eye on my son.”* Other participants found it difficult to sit in front of the computer for prolonged periods of time: *“... it was just frying my brain because if you're in an actual work situation, you are in a physical location, you can stand up and take a break or get a drink. But when you're in a Zoom call, everything just goes and then you can't even stand up because you might miss something.”*

Some participants also had limited access to a quiet space, particularly if their partners or other family members were in the same room. Participants used background filters on Zoom to reduce distraction, put themselves on mute, or found alternative methods of creating a quiet space. Limited access to computers or laptops, as well as poor Internet connection was a common challenge. Participants turned off their cameras to better stabilize their Internet connections, but because other participants could no longer see them, it hindered the interaction between participants. A few programs started a computer lending program so that participants who did not have access to equipment could still take part.

Communicating with participants online and remotely was another challenge. Program staff faced difficulties speaking with participants over the phone or by email, and delivering the training over Zoom, as it was more challenging to convey information online than in-person, especially with participants who had lower official language proficiency. Some participants had little to no experience using various technological devices or platforms, which required significant efforts from the program staff to support the participants one-on-one. However, by the end of the program, participants had developed and improved their digital skills, and program staff observed a sense of accomplishment amongst the participants.

Many service providers experienced recruitment challenges, mainly because of COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, pilot service providers experienced challenges in recruiting women for the program. With travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic, program staff observed that fewer new permanent residents were entering Canada, which reduced the pool of potentially eligible candidates. Staff heard that some potential participants also did not want to

work outside of their homes during the pandemic out of worry that they would get COVID-19 or pass it along to their families. This worry prohibited them from joining the program, as they were not seeking to find employment. Program staff in Model 4 noted their unique barrier in recruiting women for the program, because women did not want to give up their income assistance or CERB, especially during these uncertain times. As explained by a staff member, *“... because of many women are not really looking forward to come out for their commitment and kids to be able to stay at home, supporting their family, and the support they're getting from government.”*

Program staff and participants emphasized the need to advertise and market the program widely through Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media platforms. Connecting with local community organizations was also integral in reaching out to newcomer women, as not all women use social media, and to reach women in remote areas.

It was difficult to build a program that satisfied the varied needs, employment goals, and industry interests of participants

Because the continuum of interventions targeted women who were at different places in their integration to the labour market, the program did not address every participant's individual needs or employment goals. Within each of the programs, participants' needs were also varied, and thus, it was a challenge for the group sessions of the programs to meet the individual needs of all participants. To mitigate this challenge, program staff provided individualized support to participants to address their specific needs. For example, staff addressed specific inquiries related to the participant's situation and/or employment journey as it related to the participant's intended occupation in one-on-one sessions.

While, for the most part, programs offered opportunities for participants to connect with employers, some participants suggested that more connections with employers in their field were needed. The pandemic also made it difficult for participants to connect with employers.

Most programs included employer engagement activities in which participants were connected with employers. Some participants reported having built strong relationships with employers through in-person or online engagement events, such as mock interviews, panel sessions or job fairs with employers from different industries, informational interviewing, and mentorship events. Participating in employer engagement activities allowed participants to build their network, gain confidence in speaking with employers, and obtain information about their industries of interest. As explained by a Model 1 participant, *“So I think the best part of the programs was that the opportunity of inviting those employers and then the opportunity that we*

are able to get to know them, ask questions, and then at the same time, these employers give tips on how we can get hired.” Some participants were offered job interviews or employment directly through panel sessions, job fairs and informational interviews. Participants benefited from having mentors or champions in the program, and some found employment through them.

However, not all participants found the employer engagement opportunities helpful in their job search. One of the main dissatisfactions with employer connection activities was not having enough opportunities to interact with employers. For example, participants noted that speed mentoring events were too short or not frequent enough. Other participants felt that they could not make personal connections with employers during job fairs, as employers delivered a presentation and did not speak to the participants individually. A participant explained, *“They [employers] don't talk to the participants, and they didn't see me. They didn't see my face; they didn't see my name. It doesn't help us. It wasn't very useful. They just did presentation with video, and questions were asked by host. It wasn't very useful to meet the employers.”*

Participants in programs that were not designed to be occupation-specific noted that they wanted connections with occupation-specific employers to be able to ask specific questions and build networks. To mitigate this challenge, program staff supported participants in reaching out to employers or professionals in their field of interest via LinkedIn or through other means.

Connecting with employers was challenging, in part due to the pandemic

The pandemic introduced challenges for program staff to engage with employers, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown as employers' priorities changed, and understandably put their organization and own employees first. As highlighted by a program staff member, *“There was probably about a month and a half of a time period, right when COVID hit, when I wasn't able to do employer engagement at all.”* As employers slowly started to find grounding amidst the pandemic, program staff continued to reach out to employers over LinkedIn and through emails to invite them to events.

Staff highlighted the importance of staying connected to the labour market and with employers for two main reasons. First, program staff observed that labour market demands were constantly changing during the pandemic. Staff saw an increase in demand for retail, customer service, manufacturing, and cleaning and sanitation jobs during the pandemic. By knowing the labour market demands, program staff adjusted their program to be more aligned with these needs. There was also a demand for individuals with an education background or those who were bilingual.

Second, employers' interests and priorities were continuously changing. Before the pandemic, employers were willing and excited to speak with program staff. While employers were still interested in supporting the program during the pandemic, program staff experienced great

difficulties in hearing back from employers, particularly in the earlier months of the pandemic restrictions, as employers were managing layoffs and changes with their work environments.

Program staff observed that one of the key approaches to engaging with employers was increasing their awareness of the skills and expertise the program held. Identifying the labour market demands, the needs of the employer, and what employers were looking for in a candidate was also important in engaging with employers, because this approach allowed participants to identify the specific skills they needed to develop and improve to meet the employers' needs. Program staff held multiple and frequent recruitment events and employer engagement activities to build stronger relationships with employers and to publicize the program. A few of the staff recognized the importance of having a designated job developer/employer liaison person to focus on building relationships with employers and finding opportunities for participants.

Finding work placements to meet the needs of participants, employers and the program was challenging

Programs based on Models 1 and 4 included a work placement component. While work placements worked well for some participants, other participants, as well as program staff faced challenges in finding suitable work placements. Work placement openings were not always aligned with the expectations or needs of the program staff or participants. For example, participants in MOSAIC's first cohort were offered casual positions from employers, instead of either full-time or part-time work placements as anticipated. Casual positions did not work well for many participants as they did not offer participants stable work hours or financial stability. As explained by a program staff member, *"And we've also found that in the first cohort, we had women who were single mothers, and again, it's this casual work placement is so tricky for them, like so difficult. I would say the money is a huge part of that, but also their availability because they're working with the childcare needs of their children."*

Some program staff and participants experienced hesitancy from employers in hiring participants, or encountered employers expecting participants to work as non-paid volunteers. Other participants who were offered paid work placements could not accept the offer due to their physical health constraints, such as jobs requiring heavy lifting. Program staff observed that several participants had high expectations about finding employment in their field, despite not having the language skills required for such positions.

Program staff also noted that the labour market demands had become even more competitive with the onset of the pandemic. Employers' expectations had been raised, as explained by Model 4 program staff members, since there is more competition for jobs due to the labour market downturn.

For participants who enjoyed and found value in their work placements, participants appreciated building connections with their colleagues, and experiencing some of their first Canadian work experience. Others were able to continue with their positions after the work placement period had ended. And for participants who had not yet found work placements at the time of the focus groups, they expressed that the program had prepared them well to start their work placement.

Wage subsidies played an important role for participants in Model 4 in obtaining work placements. Without wage subsidies, participants felt that employers would not have hired them, and the subsidies also allowed employers to give participants “*a chance to prove themselves at work.*” The perspectives of employers will be explored in the final report. Some participants were not able to use the full subsidy, as searching for a work placement took up a significant amount of the time of the work placement period. Participants suggested that it would be useful to increase the work placement period to beyond three months. An additional challenge with wage subsidies was that a 75 per cent wage subsidy was not enough for some employers: program staff noted that some not-for-profit organizations that could have been potential employers indicated that they were unable to cover the remaining 25 per cent.

Despite most programs initially including childcare supports in the design, finding childcare supports was a major barrier for participants' attendance and engagement in the program

Program staff faced difficulties finding childcare supports for participants, as participants had multiple family responsibilities within the home that reduced their ability to fully engage in the program. The IRCC requirements for childcare funding made it difficult for programs to provide childcare supports to participants, especially in large centres where access to childcare spots is limited.

The research project components added an additional layer of complexity for staff

For many staff, this was the first research project that they had worked on, and, therefore, in the first few months of program implementation, there was a learning period about the different aspects of the research. For the models recruiting participants for both program and comparison groups, program staff experienced challenges in managing upset participants who were randomly assigned to the comparison group. As explained by one program staff member, participants were scared of the “*uncertainty of not knowing which group they're going to end up in.*” Program staff explained the importance of comparison groups to the participants, and worked to support participants in comparison groups with meeting their employment goals through regular services provided by their organizations. Staff became more comfortable with the research components over time.

After the programs moved to online delivery, participants faced difficulties in completing surveys from home, particularly for participants with lower English language levels, (i.e., CLB 4). Program staff worked to overcome this challenge by providing an option to read out the survey questions to the participants.

WHAT IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS WERE LEARNED ABOUT PROVIDING SERVICES TO VISIBLE MINORITY NEWCOMER WOMEN?

In addition to what has been highlighted in terms of successes and challenges in the implementation of employment services for visible minority newcomer women, the following lessons were learned by program staff.

- Although many partner service providers had previously worked with newcomer women, the resiliency and strength of newcomer women was highlighted while working with women who had arrived in Canada just before the onset or during the pandemic. Given all the barriers newcomer women faced prior to immigrating to Canada, and the barriers they faced in Canada, especially in these uncertain times, many women still attended the program ready to learn, full of questions, and always supporting other women.
- But while many women were committed to participating in the program, several women joined the program without having specific career goals, but rather the sole goal of obtaining employment as soon as possible to support their families financially. And so, building career exploration opportunities into the program was emphasized as a key part of the program by both staff and participants.
- Confidence-building was perceived by program staff and participants to be another key component of the program, and as important as skills building because many participants were lacking in confidence. Self-reflection also supported confidence building through creating vision boards or action plans that allowed participants to become more aware of the skills they already had.
- As newcomer women experienced feeling isolated in a new country, without family and friend supports, as well as stressors related to lack of recognition of previous work experience or education, and integration challenges, mental health support was observed to be an important piece in an employment program. Program staff tried to support participants by having frequent check-ins and bringing in experts to talk about mental health with participants. Participants also received emotional support from other women in the program. Program staff identified that it was important to provide community resources and ways to access these resources to participants, which was echoed by participants who

suggested including mental health related topics in the program, including referrals to or information about available services.

- Being flexible in delivering the program to participants, particularly those with children, and also being flexible while working with employers was identified as a core tenet of program delivery. As explained by a Model 1 staff member, flexibility was even more critical during online delivery to account for technological problems and childcare responsibilities: “... *it's all related to the situation we all are in right now, but you have to always have a plan B and C. That's the lesson I would say, because we are in a very fluid situation. So the lesson we have learned is that we have to be vigilant.*” Staff could adopt flexibility by encouraging participants to take care of children or themselves whenever they needed. For instance, program staff offered one-on-one supports to participants who missed sessions. Program staff also emphasized the need to continuously communicate with employers about program updates.
- Since women with varying levels of skills and experience, and many different interests participate in the program, it was important to acknowledge that there would always be participant needs the program could not meet, such as English language supports. Additionally, if women were experiencing personal challenges and were not fully engaged in the program, the program would not completely meet their needs. So, program staff felt that it was important for them to be connected with other organizations to provide services that the program could not provide themselves to participants.

WHAT SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT DO PARTICIPANTS HAVE?

Participants raised the following suggestions related to the design and delivery of the programs.

- Participants suggested that there was a need to find ways to add industry-specific opportunities into the general program. Because employer engagement activities and mentorship opportunities were highly valued by participants, participants’ main suggestion was for the program to introduce more of these opportunities, particularly with employers or mentors in as many industries as possible. One method of increasing these opportunities included inviting successful women from previous cohorts to volunteer as mentors for women in the current cohort. Other participants suggested simply having more networking events or job fairs with employers and restructuring employer panels so employers can address what characteristics make for a good candidate and what exactly they are looking for in potential employees.

- Participants suggested various topics to include into training sessions to further meet their needs, as well as additional ways to support the women in the program. Some of these suggestions included: discrimination and unconscious bias in the workplace, racism, sexual harassment in the workplace, how to manage difficult situations should they arise, employee rights in the workplace, and how to handle conflicts.
- Other suggestions from participants included:
 - Recording the online sessions, so the women who missed the day would be able to catch up;
 - Providing resources to enhance English language skills, such as an English conversation clubs within the organization; and
 - For those who did not have work placement opportunities, including a work experience component.

IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS BY PILOT SITE

This section presents a more in-depth picture of each of the eleven piloted interventions, including a description of the program, key program features, modifications to the program, what worked well, and challenges.

MODEL 1 — MILESTONES TO EMPLOYMENT

Three organizations implemented an intervention based on Model 1: Achēv, OFE, and MOSAIC. Model 1 is characterized by its demand-led approach and its use of milestones to collect data and track participants progress towards specified outcomes. As described previously in this report, the aim of this model is to facilitate and support the transition to a work placement with the goal of continued employment and advancement.

Achēv — Milestones to Employment

Description of the intervention

Achēv is piloting two models — Milestones to Employment (Model 1) and Navigating the Canadian Labour Market (Model 2). These are described separately because they are distinct programs targeted to different groups of visible minority newcomer women. This section describes the Model 1 program A Achēv implemented and how it was implemented.

Milestones to Employment is Achēv's program based on Model 1. It provides participants in the Greater Toronto Area with a four-week employment readiness training module coupled with occupation-specific training and a work placement in two high-growth industries, namely commercial cleaning, and senior care. According to staff, the program is a complete one, as they are “giving them employability skills, confidence and empowering them, creating that network. So, it's kind of an amalgamation of so many little components which make a person complete.”

A case study design was adopted as the research design for Achēv's Milestones to Employment program, which means that all potential participants are invited to participate in the program (i.e., no comparison group).

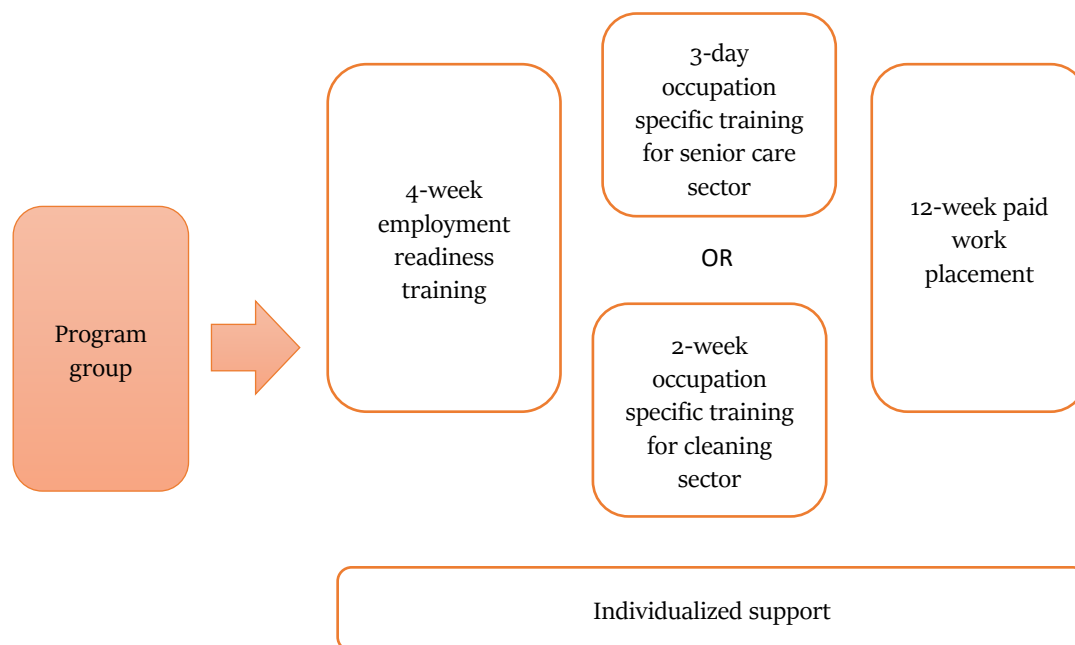
Table 16 Summary of Achēv's Milestones to Employment program

Milestones to Employment by Achēv	
Model	Model 1
Region served	Greater Toronto Area
Targeted sectors	Commercial cleaning Senior care
Key program components	A demand-led program that takes a milestones approach and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4-week employment readiness training ▪ Occupation-specific training (2 weeks for commercial cleaning; 2 days ORCA training and 1-day food handling for senior care) ▪ Paid work placement ▪ Individualized support
Length of the program	18 weeks (incl. work placement) for the commercial cleaning cohorts 16 weeks (incl. work placement) for the senior care cohorts
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ CLB level 4 at minimum ▪ Interest in commercial cleaning or senior care
Target number of participants	75
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	11
Agreement period	February 2020 to November 2021 ³⁹
Research design	Case study design for proof of concept (no comparison group)

Figure 13 below depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each of the program components is explored in detail below.

³⁹ Achēv's project started in March 2020, later than other sites, and did not begin recruiting participants until summer 2020. The first cohort was delayed by the pandemic.

Figure 13 Milestones to Employment process diagram



- Employment readiness training** — The first part of the training is a four-week training program (five days a week, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.) that focuses on employability, soft skills, the Canadian workplace, and other topics that might be useful for employment in Canada such as employment rights. Facilitators use occupation-specific examples, and when possible, employer-specific examples to facilitate the transition from the classroom to employment. The first cohort was delivered in person, and plans were for fall cohorts to be delivered online due to the pandemic.
- Occupation-specific training** — The occupation-specific training follows the employment readiness training, and as implied by its name, it is different for each of the two target occupations of this program. The occupation-specific training for the commercial cleaning sector is a two-week in-person program (five days a week) offered by the Canadian Cleaning Council. During this training, participants have the opportunity to put into practice their newfound knowledge through hands on training with equipment. At the end, they receive the Custodian Technical Training certificate. For the senior care sector, participants take part in Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA) training. It is delivered during the four-week employment readiness training by program staff. Participants also receive training to pass the Food Handling Certificate after the four-week program. As explained by a program staff, occupation-specific training helps participants understand what the specific

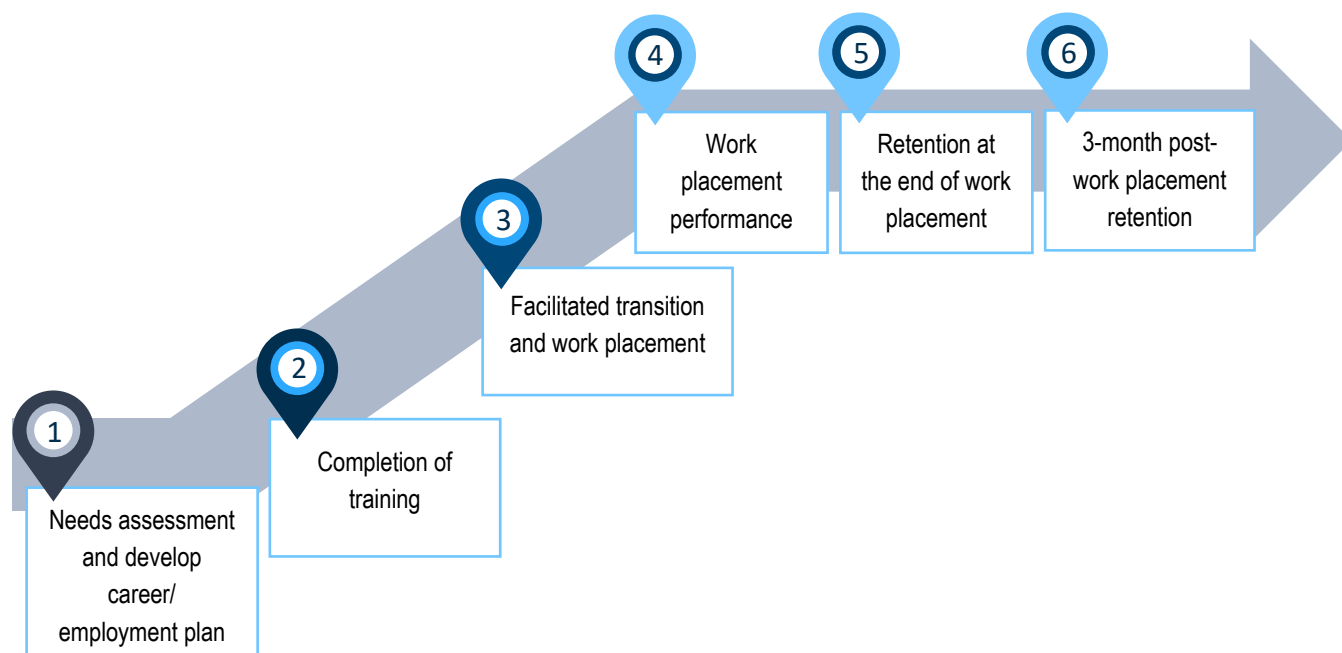
jobs entail so that “*nothing is grey, everything is black and white, everything is clear*”, which helps with job readiness and retention.

- **Work placement** — After the training, participants take part in a 12-week paid work placement. The placement is a real position within an organization, and to that end, they need to apply for the position and go through the usual application process. At the end of the 12 weeks, participants are reassessed by the employer with the intention of retaining them in their current jobs.
- **Individualized support** — throughout the program and during the whole work placement process, coaches meet one-on-one with participants to further support them. This can include supporting them with resume writing, interview preparation, gathering documents needed for the position, support during the work placement, and after to either help them find another position or to stay in their current one.

Two innovative features of this model include a demand-led approach, which involves engaging with employers throughout the whole program cycle (from design to delivery to employment) and a milestones approach.

- **Demand-led approach** — Achēv engaged employers in the development of the curriculum for each of the two streams to align the training with both the needs of the employers and the job seekers. Elements that they have included based on employer input include employment expectations, job descriptions, and potential challenges. In addition, during the training, occupation-specific examples are used. For instance, they might work on reading and communication by using an example of a type of document that participants would encounter in the job. As mentioned previously, an industry partner delivers the occupation-specific training. Guest speakers from the industry (either people working in it or employers) are invited to come talk to participants. The work placement opportunities are also identified in partnership with industry partners and employers.
- **Milestones approach** — program staff have developed six milestones that are aimed to help job seekers reach a series of intermediate success indicators believed to be associated with progress towards sustainable employment. Figure 14 shows the six milestones. Staff have described this approach as a good way of tracking the progress of participants and of providing guidance for Achēv in knowing what “specific markers that [participants] have to work on prior to moving to the next one.” As one program staff put it, “*milestones keep us focused.*”

Figure 14 Milestones for Achēv’s Milestones to Employment program



Modifications to the program

While implementation of the program has been successful, several changes had to be made because of the pandemic:

- The pandemic started as Achēv was developing its program. Initially, the two industries targeted by this program were commercial cleaning and the food industry (specifically catering for airlines). However, the food industry was hard hit by Covid-19 and thus was no longer a viable option for this project. Staff looked for a sector with a high need for lower-skilled employees, and senior care fit those criteria.
- When the program started in August 2020, the program could be held in-person with proper distancing and use of personal protective equipment. Because the context in the area changed, the second and third cohorts were done online. Program staff developed tools to be able to hold intake sessions online over multiple sessions and training content had to be adapted to online delivery.
- The two-week commercial cleaning occupation-specific training, which needs to be done in-person, was completed by cohort 1. It has now been put on hold indefinitely for cohort 2.

Unrelated to the pandemic, after the first cohort, program staff had to adapt the content to better meet the needs of women with lower English language proficiency. For example, they adjusted the vocabulary and the speed at which the content was delivered.

Challenges

Two main challenges have been encountered to date in the delivery of this program:

- Delivering the program online to women with lower English language proficiency and digital skills: Some women had limited digital skills when they signed up for the program, which was less of a problem if the program remained in-person. Achēv staff referred them to free computer training prior to the start of the cohort if time permitted. Staff also realized that not all participants had the proper computer equipment to participate in the program so Achēv started a computer lending program for participants to mitigate this barrier with IRCC funding.
- The process to obtain a work placement: Some of the employers required criminal record checks to be eligible for work placements. If a participant has been in Canada for less than five years, they require a criminal record check from their home country. Obtaining this information can be costly, difficult depending on the country of origin, and takes time. To mitigate these issues, the cost is now being covered by IRCC for those participants requiring this assistance and the process is started earlier on during the program to shorten the period between the end of the training and the start of the placement.

What's working well

Staff have been satisfied with the program implementation to date and with the preliminary effects on women. Specifically, they mentioned:

- Being able to recruit participants despite the lower level of new immigrants coming to Canada, and the shift in priorities during the pandemic (finding a job vs. other family obligations).
- Bringing women together as a cohort — staff have noticed that bringing together women has allowed them to make connections and to expand their social networks. As explained by staff, *“bringing these women under one platform, they look forward to mingling, to learn together, [...] they are learning and growing together”* and *“it’s a big component for their integration.”*
- Being able to provide transportation supports, when needed, for the duration of the work placement. This removes one of the barriers to employment for these women.

OFE — Career Pathways Program

Description of the intervention

Opportunities for Employment (OFE) built on their previous experience with demand-led programs using a milestones approach to develop the Career Pathways Program based on Model 1. The program offers visible minority newcomer women with little to no Canadian work experience a pathway to employment in one of four in-demand sectors: manufacturing and warehousing, retail, customer care industry, and health services support. Depending on the assessed needs of participants, the program may include a one-week workplace preparation training, a one-week occupation-specific training, and, for some employers, a paid two-week workplace exposure, technical training, or work experience with the aim of long-term employment.

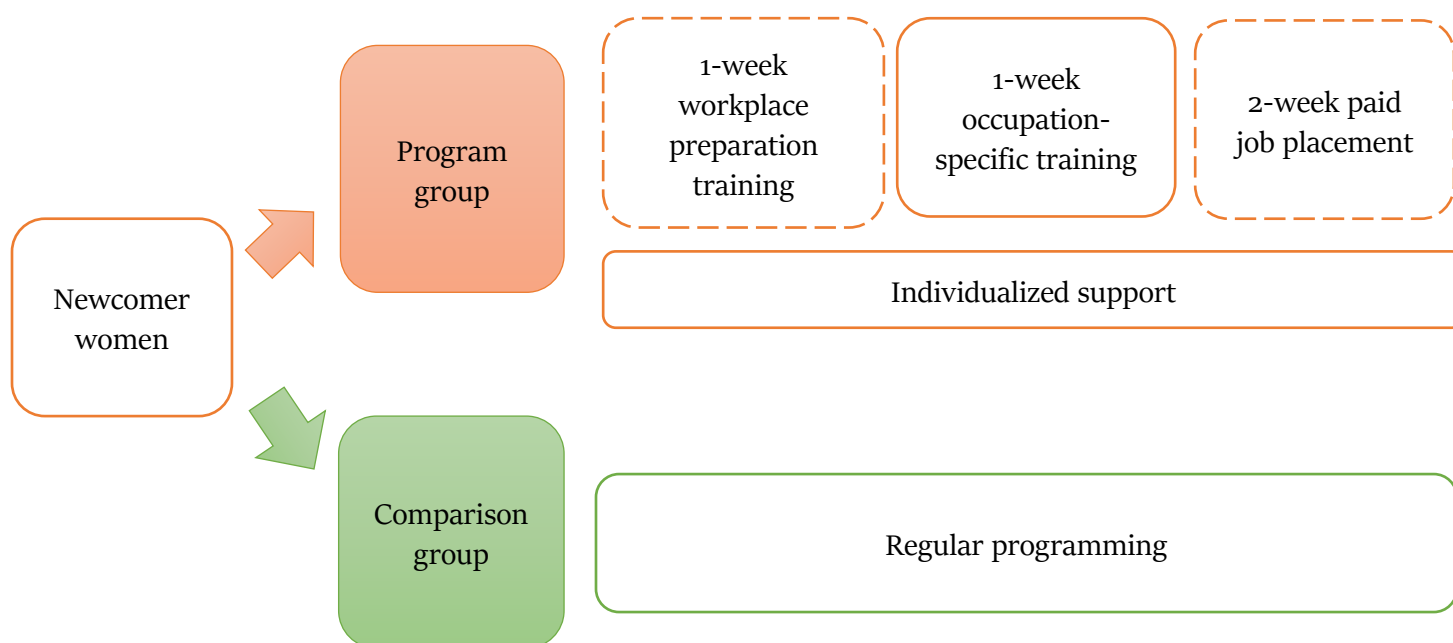
This intervention has adopted an experimental design in which 70 per cent of participants are assigned to the program, and 30 per cent are referred to OFE's regular programming.

Table 17 **Summary of OFE's Career Pathways program**

Career Pathways Program by OFE	
Model	Model 1
Region served	Winnipeg
Key program components	<p>A demand-led program that takes a milestones approach and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1-week workplace preparation training ▪ 1-week occupation-specific training ▪ Paid job placement (available with some employers) ▪ Individualized support
Length of the program	Up to 4 weeks
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ Have no or limited Canadian work experience and would like to have long-term employment in one of the in-demand job sectors of the program
Target number of participants	224
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	92
Agreement period	January 2020 to October 2021
Research design	Experimental design

Figure 15 depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each program component is described in detail below.

Figure 15 Career Pathways Program process diagram



- **Needs assessments** – an initial step before participants are referred to training is a needs assessment in which participants are pre-screened to identify their abilities and their willingness to work in one of the in-demand sectors. Participants are also assessed for skills that are necessary for the chosen sector such as, among others, basic computer skills and ability to interact with people.
- **Workplace preparation training** – This module usually lasts about one week and introduces the sector-specific employability skills that are required for success as well as the Canadian workplace culture. Participants get to put these employability skills into practice through hands-on activities. Topics covered include emotional intelligence, communication, adaptability, continuous learning, health, and wellness. While in the Canadian Workplace Culture Workshop participants gain valuable knowledge about their rights as an employee, diversity in Canadian Workplaces, and common organizational characteristics.
- **Occupation-specific training** – This one-week training aims to bridge the gap between the employers' specific requirements and the participants' essential skill levels. Depending on

the needs of participants, the training may be reduced to four days or increased by a few more days. This training is also offered to non-CPP OFE clients (though not to comparison group members) so the training often includes both CPP participants as well as others, including Canadian citizens and men. Topics depend on the sector but can include following instructions, health and safety, role playing, customer service, and interview preparation.

- **Job placement** — Some employers offer a two-week job placement to candidates to determine if the person meets the requirements for the job. While not all employers offer a two-week job placement per se, all participants are connected with employers who are looking to fill opportunities for which the participant has been trained and who are aligned with the skills of the participant. In the end, as OFE staff emphasize, *“So when we talk about work placement or work experience, it’s always a job. And if participants do well, they just stay in this job. And of course, our employers are only interested in keeping them because otherwise they let this person go and they have to hire another person and train another person so it’s never the interest of the employer.”*
- **Individualized support** — staff support participants in their job search and preparation through activities such as interview preparation, mock interviews, coaching.

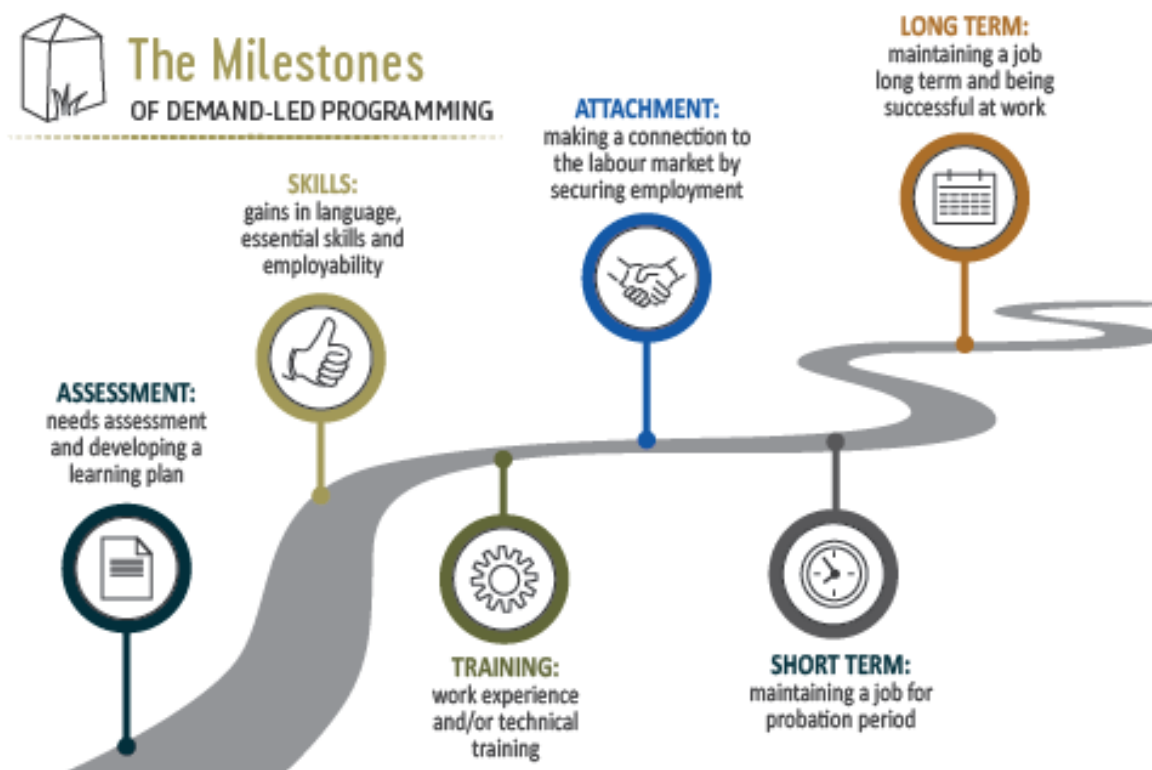
In addition to the program components presented above, Model 1 is based on two innovative approaches:

- **A demand-led design:** Prior to designing the program, OFE identified which sectors and which jobs were in demand, and then, which employers had an unmet demand for employees. As a next step, OFE developed essential skill profiles of those occupations on which the curriculum for the occupation-specific training and the employer assessments were then based. Employers in four sectors — manufacturing and production, retail and hospitality, health services support, and customer contact industry — were approached by OFE to partner on this project. Employers who agreed to partner were asked to complete employer assessment forms and profiles as a first step. They were then asked to give feedback on profiles and assessments as well as to provide minimum scores for the employer milestones. However, the pandemic impacted the level of engagement of employer partners, and thus, their involvement was more limited than anticipated initially. OFE staff mentioned that these changes in demand are to be expected, albeit not necessarily on this scale, and they are always adapting the program to meet the demand.
- **Milestones approach with incentive payments:** OFE’s milestones to employment model tracks participants’ progress through the program and into the labour market using five milestones: 1) gains in career adaptability and employability during training, 2) demonstration of occupational specific essential skills as assessed by the participant’s employer, 3) number of days from the end of training until a participant is placed into full-

time employment, 4) the full-time employment rate, and 5) the job retention rate at three months post-employment. These milestones are compared to standards that were calculated based on OFE historical data and previous SRDC projects. Those related to employment were updated in January 2021 to reflect COVID-19 changes to the Winnipeg labour market. IRCC issues premium payments to OFE semi-annually with the amount based on achievements above and beyond the calculated standard for each milestone.

Staff have been using the milestones approach as a way of understanding which pieces work well and which ones need to be amended as well as to help staff focus on outcomes of interest for participants. As explained by staff, *“So by milestones, we can see the separate pieces and identify specific outcomes and identify which outcomes are positive and which outcomes have to be addressed or have to be amended. It allows us to target our efforts in specific points of programming and be specific with the conclusion, changes focused on outcomes.”*

Figure 16 Milestones for OFE's Career Pathways program



Modifications

The pandemic required the program to be adapted in the following ways:

- Shifted to online delivery for a few months but went back to in-person delivery in July 2020; however, they kept offering three modes: online, in-person, and self-study. OFE is now exploring hybrid models to reach more participants. Participants who will be placed in jobs that require in-person presence are encouraged to participate in the training in-person to address any challenges or anxieties that it might cause prior to starting employment.
- Developed a self-study resume course to ensure participants' resumes are tailored and ready to be submitted by the end of the occupation-specific training.
- As mentioned above, the program initially focused on four sectors. However, due to the impacts of the pandemic, two of the sectors — manufacturing, and retail and hospitality — disengaged from the program. The hospitality sector was deeply affected by the pandemic and could no longer be considered an in-demand occupation, and, as such, OFE continued with retail only. While the employer partner for the retail sector no longer had a demand for employees, OFE decided to continue to offer this stream without the employer partner because they still saw demand in different retail areas. Instead of the employer partner informing the development of the curriculum, OFE used information at their disposal from their own research. Since there are no work placements associated with this stream, OFE prepares participants for them to apply for a position on their own.
- Adapted the curriculum to the emerging needs of the employers and of the participants. For example, some jobs that previously did not require much digital skills now did. OFE worked with employers to understand their evolving requirements. The program addresses concerns from participants to work outside the home and prepares them for virtual interviews and onboarding.

In addition to the modifications made as a result of COVID-19, OFE made the following change:

- Initially, the program was delivered on an ongoing basis, which meant that participants were not grouped as cohorts of participants. OFE staff found that, with this approach, participants were not connecting with other participants and with staff. To remedy the situation, OFE decided to offer the workplace preparation component as a cohort to address the specific needs of participants. It also allows participants to connect with others who are in similar situations as them. Another benefit of this change is that the transition from one program component to another is seamless (i.e., there are no delays) which has resulted in high program engagement from participants.

Challenges

Two main program delivery challenges were highlighted by staff:

- Recruiting the target number of participants proved to be difficult, particularly so with the onset of lockdown measures due to COVID-19. Participants' level of interest in joining the program was low because they were either not in a rush to find employment or were hesitant in finding employment due to the pandemic. Additionally, the number of newcomers landing in Manitoba had decreased due to COVID-19 restrictions. Recruitment for the online program went smoothly during the months of June and July, but with the increase in numbers of COVID-19 cases in Manitoba, intake numbers decreased in the fall of 2020. While OFE delivered its program in-person for a short period in the fall, many participants preferred to participate online to keep safe. OFE staff worked to spread the word of the program widely to ensure organizations and newcomers were aware of the program.
- Engaging with employers was difficult and led to the staff and participants postponing progress with Milestone 2, in which employers could not assess participants in the program. Staff worked to resolve this issue by keeping in touch with employers and reminding employers the importance of assessing participants to meet Milestone 2. Furthermore, staff experienced changes in demand from employers they previously had relationships with, particularly the retail sector. Nevertheless, staff continued to prepare participants for the retail sector without employer partnerships and supported them in applying for employment opportunities independently. For the other sectors, employers remained involved in the program, albeit in a limited way.

What's working well

Overall, the program has been implemented successfully to date. Staff highlighted the following two features as working particularly well:

- Using a milestones approach to deliver the program allowed staff to understand components of the program that were meeting the needs of participants, as well as components that needed to be improved. And so, staff were able to target their efforts to specific areas of the program and needs of participants.
- The flexibility of the program to meet participants' needs, as well as employers' demands was highlighted to be an important contributor to the success of the program. This was particularly true during the online transition of the program. Staff noted that while the demand of the labour market was constantly changing during the pandemic, they were able to be responsive by changing training and workshops based on current demand. Staff were

also able to further meet participants' needs by providing participants with self-study options or other online tools/resources for those participants who were only available during limited hours of the day to participate in the program, or who had to miss a day of the program.

MOSAIC — Care Pathways

Description of the intervention

MOSAIC built on their experience with a previous health care aide program that they used to run in collaboration with a college to develop the Care Pathways program. The program aims to create a pathway for visible minority newcomer women to enter in entry-level positions into senior care with an aim to become a health care aide in the future. The program offers a four-week occupational and workplace training that includes certifications in food safe and first aid as well as a 12-week job placement (when possible) or support to find related employment.

The research design adopted for this intervention is a case study design which means that all potential participants are invited to participate in the program (i.e., no comparison group).

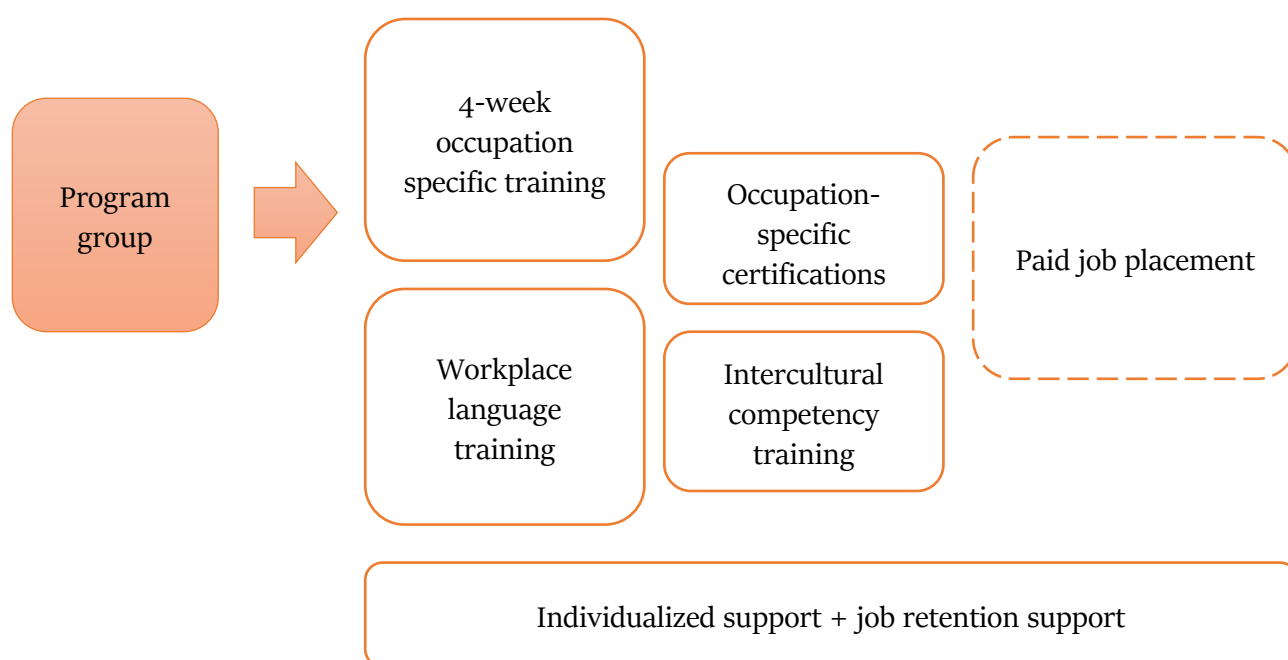
Table 18 **Summary of MOSAIC's Care Pathways program**

Care Pathways by MOSAIC	
Model	Model 1
Region served	Metro Vancouver
Key program components	<p>A demand-led program that takes a milestones approach and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occupation-specific essential skills and employment preparation training ▪ Workplace language training ▪ Paid job placement (available with some employers) ▪ Individualized support ▪ Intercultural competency training
Length of the formal program	16 weeks (incl. work placement)

Care Pathways by MOSAIC	
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming CLB 4+ Interested in an entry-level position working in senior care High school diploma or bachelor's degree Excellent health and able to perform a physically demanding job Full-time availability
Target number of participants	45
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	12
Agreement period	February 2020 to December 2021
Research design	Case study design

Figure 17 depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each component is presented below.

Figure 17 Care Pathways Process program



- **Occupation-specific essential skills and employment readiness training:** The four-week occupation-specific training (five days a week, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) was developed by MOSAIC with support from SkillPlan.⁴⁰ It is broken down into two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It focuses on employability skills and essential skills such as document use and numeracy. Participants also receive intercultural competency training. At the end of the four weeks, there is training for certifications that are required to be employed in the senior care sector: first aid, workplace hazardous materials information system (WHMIS), and FOODSAFE (for dietary aides).
- **Workplace language training:** In addition to the above base components of Model 1, a workplace language training component was added by MOSAIC. Since the senior care sector has specific vocabulary, with which participants may not be familiar, the workplace language training is an opportunity to learn new terms and practise communication as it is a key skill for this occupation. Some components of the language training are done during the occupation-specific training through activities such as mock interviews or role playing. Others are done one-on-one based on need.
- **Job placement:** Most participants from the first cohort did not secure job placements with MOSAIC's employer partner, and thus, MOSAIC worked with them to find them entry level jobs in the senior care sector with other employers or in a related field. For future cohorts, additional employers have been approached to become project partners.
- **Job retention support:** Staff connect with participants on a biweekly basis after the training to support them in their job search (if they have yet to find a job placement) through working on their resumes, practising interview skills and/or working on their action plans. Those in a job placement are also supported through action plan meetings. The aim is to continue to provide support through the work placement or through the first few months of a job.

In addition to the above program components, Model 1 adopted the following approaches:

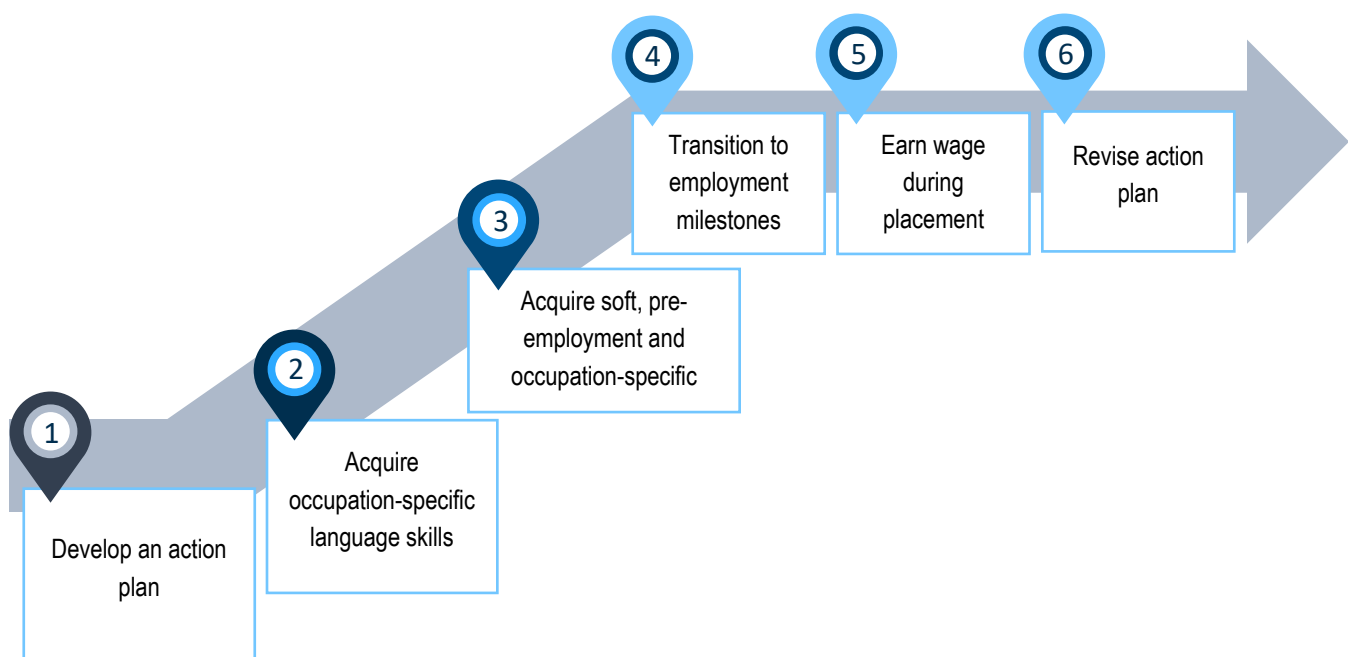
- **A demand-led design:** Initially, MOSAIC established a partnership with a large employer to have access to their personnel and original documents to inform the development of the curriculum. This was part of the demand-led approach of Model 1 in which the employer or sector is actively involved in developing the program so that it meets the needs of the employer/sector and it prepares participants to enter into a specific occupation specified at the outset. In the end, MOSAIC worked alongside SkillPlan with minimal input from the

⁴⁰ SkillPlan assessed the targeted occupations and established the skills needed to perform the duties and developed customized training to meet the specific job environments. For more information about SkillPlan <https://www.skillplan.ca/about-us/>

employer to develop the curriculum. Further details on the changes generated by this lack of engagement from the employer partner are found in the modifications section below.

- **Milestones approach:** Staff have developed a six-milestone framework that allows them to gauge participants' progress along this continuum. Figure 18 illustrates the milestones for this project. Staff have found that the milestones approach allows them to create a 'map' to assess participants' progress 'concretely.' As explained by staff, it also means that there is positive pressure on the program to support participants at each of these steps.

Figure 18 Milestones for MOSAIC's Care Pathways program



Modifications

The program launched during the pandemic, and as such, MOSAIC had to adapt its initial design to the new realities of offering a virtual program as follows:

- When the program switched to a virtual format, the length of the days had to be shortened and synchronous and asynchronous components were created. A personal protective equipment (PPE) component was added, given its importance after the start of the pandemic.

- The virtual format makes it harder for participants with lower English levels to fully engage in the training because it can be harder to read expressions or to understand what is being said online. To ensure that participants were able to fully participate in the program, the minimum English level was changed from CLB 4 to CLB 5–6.⁴¹
- The online nature of the program and the fact that more people were home or unemployed had the potential to boost the number of women interested in the program. Staff mitigated that issue by carefully reviewing applicants' profiles to identify participants who were aligned with the intended target population. This program was designed for visible minority newcomer women who were not able to enter the labour market in a traditional way, and, for example, applicants with postsecondary education whose intended job goals did not align with this sector were not selected to take part in the program.
- For the work placement component, MOSAIC had initially established a partnership with a large employer with multiple locations in which MOSAIC prepared participants for the job and the employer would provide paid work placements for participants with the intention of keeping them on after if they met the employer's requirements. However, the work placement for the first cohort did not unfold as anticipated for two reasons. Firstly, the company went through a rebranding and the employer champion left her position and the relationship had to be rebuilt and the partnership renegotiated. Participants were no longer offered a work placement as the default after completing the program; they now had to go through the traditional hiring process. In addition, positions that were offered to those who were successful were mostly casual opportunities (which means that there is no fixed number of hours or schedule). Secondly, the pandemic has put extra pressure on senior care homes. Practically, the employer partner had less time to engage in developing the curriculum with MOSAIC. As a result of these changes, staff are now framing the work placement as a potential job experience to test whether the occupation is the right fit for the participant.

Challenges

Four central challenges were addressed by staff in implementing their program:

- Like most sites, MOSAIC faced some challenges in recruiting participants at the beginning of the program. As the program transitioned to an online delivery format, some participants preferred to wait until in-person services resumed. Participants also had limited access to the Internet or computers, which prohibited them from being able to join the program. Main outreach, marketing events and venues were closed or cancelled due to the pandemic, which

⁴¹ MOSAIC still accepts some participants with CLB 4.

added to the difficulty of recruiting participants. And while staff worked to outreach and market their program using social media and reaching out to community partners throughout the pandemic, response rates were lower compared to the beginning of their recruitment period (i.e., May and June of 2020). Finally, staff saw a long waiting period for participants to get English assessments and tuberculosis tests, which were required by employers, further affecting the number of participants joining the program. Since they are required to participate in the program (negative tuberculosis test for example), MOSAIC requires these results prior to the start of the training.

- Many employers offered casual work placement positions to participants (as is the norm in this sector for new employees), which did not meet the needs of many participants. Participants preferred to have a full-time or part-time position, so they could earn a regular wage, and with consistent hours, as many of them had young children at home to care for. For the next cohort, staff worked to communicate clearly with participants that work placements would likely be casual positions, so there would be no surprises. Staff also worked to support participants in finding full-time or part-time employment.
- As it was many participants' first times using Zoom as a learning platform, staff spent a lot of time and energy supporting participants to learn how to use and navigate Zoom, as well as helping others to use computers. Staff mentioned that although participating in the online training was challenging for many participants, many were successful in overcoming this new learning environment: *"But in the end, they completed it and everybody improved quite substantially. And so I think they felt at the beginning, particularly those CLB four clients, as I think they were afraid of, can I do this? And then at the end, there was a tremendous sense of, I did it, and they were feeling really positive."*
- Initially, when MOSAIC was mapping out the milestones, it appeared straightforward, however, when it came time to implementing each milestone and developing the associated processes and protocols, it was more complicated than anticipated. For example, for the three-month placement milestone, staff discussed whether casual or part-time hours meant the criteria for completion of that milestone needed to be adapted.

What's working well

The program has been implemented successfully so far. Staff specifically noted:

- Being able to use action plans as a way for participants to reflect on their goals and successes in the program, particularly to overcome participants' disappointment in work placements. As explained by staff, *"I love the action plan because it brings the larger goals and brings them down into these little steps. And I think we can lose sight of those little successes as we look at the larger picture."*

- The training and workshops met participants' needs, particularly in terms of helping participants obtain certificates, such as FOODSAFE, developing a targeted resume, and improving interview skills to succeed in a job interview.

MODEL 2 — NAVIGATING THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET

Five service partners implemented an intervention based on Model 2: Achēv, ACCES Employment, ISANS, World Skills, and YWCA Metro Vancouver. Model 2 is characterized by its basis in the essential skills framework developed by the Government of Canada.

Achēv — Career Pathways for Women

Description of intervention

Career Pathways for Women is Achēv's program based on Model 2. The goal of this program is to support visible minority newcomer women in the development of a clear career plan based on a thorough assessment of their skills and provide them with opportunities for portfolio development, essential skill enhancement, develop professional networks and connect with potential employers. To achieve this goal, the program offers two weeks of employability group training during which participants also create an essential skills portfolio. This is followed by ten weeks of additional supports whether it be customized one-on-one support or self-guided essential skill enhancement.

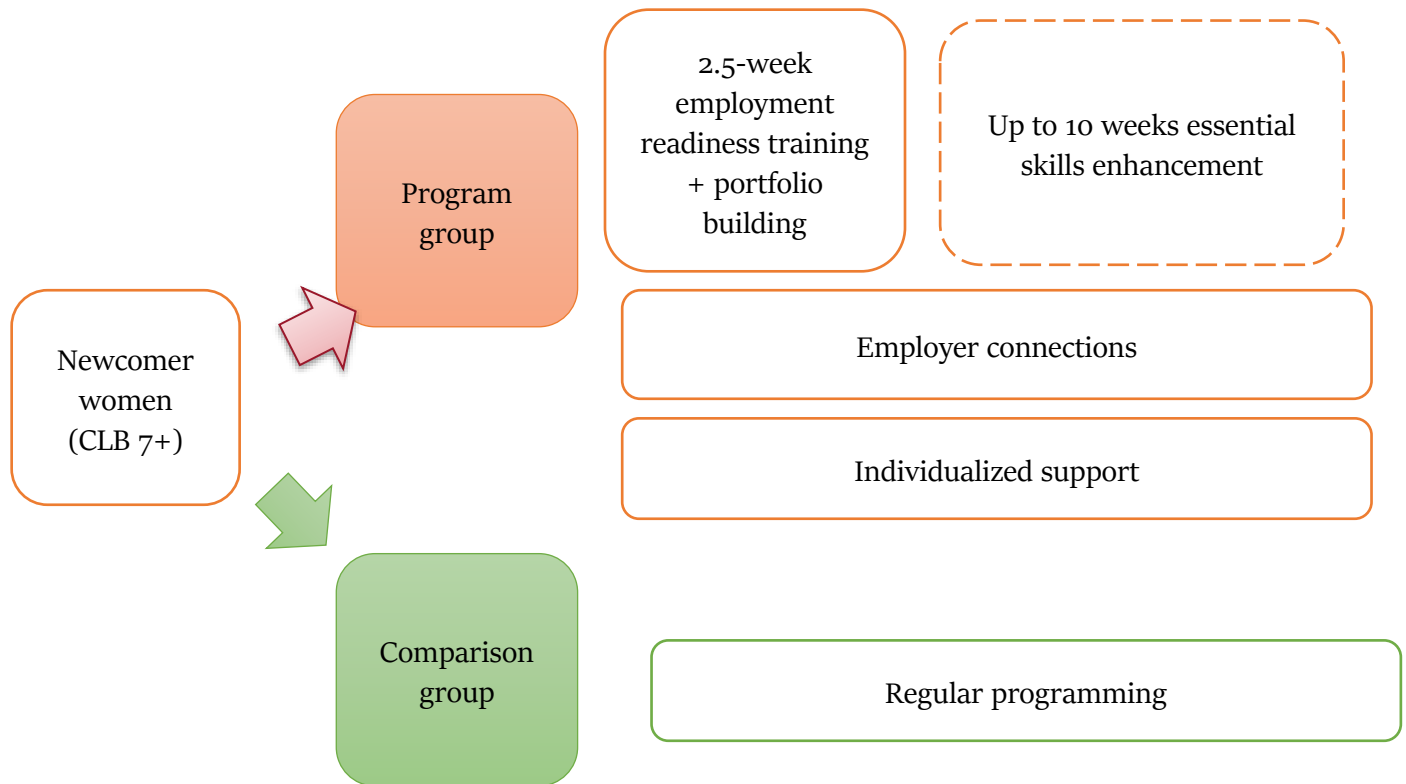
This intervention adopted an experimental research design which means that eligible participants are randomly assigned either to the program group and can take part in the program or to the comparison group and are then referred to other services at Achēv. Initially, the random assignment ratio was 50/50, however, in fall 2020, it was changed to 75 program / 25 comparison due to recruitment challenges.

Table 19 **Summary of Achēv's Career Pathways for Women program**

Career Pathways for Women by Achēv	
Model	Model 2
Region served	GTA
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2-week employment readiness training, which includes the development of an essential skills portfolio ▪ Essential skills enhancement, if deemed necessary ▪ Employer connections ▪ Customized support
Length of formal program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 12 weeks
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ CLB 7 or higher in English ▪ Postsecondary education
Target number of participants	210 program; 210 comparison
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	125
Agreement period	July 2019 to September 2021
Research design	Experimental design

Figure 19 depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each of the program components is explored in detail below.

Figure 19 Career Pathways for Women process diagram



- Essential skills:** One of the innovative features of this model is its application of the essential skills framework developed by the Government of Canada. Participants are first introduced to essential skills during the online baseline essential skill assessments that assess skills in four competencies: numeracy, listening, document use, and digital skills. The group training dedicates one day on essential skills training. Program group participants use the essential skills profile created by the Government of Canada to compare their scores with those needed for their occupation of interest. This is also an opportunity for participants to start reflecting on their essential skills. Participants are then invited to develop a portfolio to reflect their work history, their credentials, their essential skills and how that links with the occupational profiles and then present it to their peers. Achēv staff noticed a need for digital skills upskilling for all participants, and now offer a session offered by a third party on presentation skills and using PowerPoint. Beyond the two-week group training, participants are invited to further their skills in the areas in which they have identified gaps. This skill enhancement takes the form of self-directed training. Achēv staff provide links to online training and coaches follow up with participants for up to 10 weeks as part of their action plan.

- **Employment readiness training:** The program begins with a 2.5-week (five days a week, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.) group training that covers job search skills, Canadian workplace culture training, employability skills (i.e., resume writing, interview skills), creating an online presence (including LinkedIn), networking skills, diversity and inclusion, and employment rights and health and safety in Canada. Guest speakers are brought in from within and outside the organization to speak on specific topics such as other Achēv supports available (internal) and diversity and inclusion (external). The training also includes activities described in the essential skills section above. It also explores personality dimensions which, according to staff, helps clients understand their personality and their work and communication styles, and how these impact their career.
- **Employer connections:** Participants are introduced or connected to employers in a variety of ways with some providing more meaningful connections than others. As explained by a staff member, employer connections for this program are focused on making that introduction to employers, and not necessarily on connecting participants with jobs: *“In this case, it’s not traditional job development management, matching and placing clients, but it is preparing them to navigate, introducing them to people, building a more variety of employer engagement.”* One of the main employer connection activities is for participants to do at least three informational interviews with professionals in their field. This is an opportunity for participants to connect one-on-one with potential employers to learn about their occupation of interest. In addition to this activity, one or two employers — often, recruiters or HR who are also visible minority newcomer women — are invited to the graduation ceremony. In the fall 2020, Achēv introduced speed networking session in which they invite a variety of employers from different industries to answer participants’ questions. They also plan to add job and/or career fairs to facilitate participants’ job search.
- **Customized support:** Each program group participant is matched with a coach who supports them in their individual path to employment. This process begins by sitting down with the participant to create an action plan for their job search, which might include plans for essential skills enhancement. Coaches also work with clients to adapt resumes and practise interview skills for specific jobs to which the participant has applied.

Modifications to the program

Although the program was designed to be delivered in-person, due to Covid-19, Achēv shifted to a fully virtual delivery since mid-March 2020. The program is now delivered through Zoom. Since the staff had limited prior experience in online delivery, they mentioned that the first few online cohorts were not as interactive as the program has been before. However, they quickly adjusted the program to fit the online format. One of the main changes to the program was to lengthen the employment readiness training from two weeks to 2.5 weeks. This allowed for more

customized coaching from the beginning of the program as well as more flexibility in participants' schedules to deal with family matters (i.e., kids at home) if necessary.

Challenges

Three main implementation challenges were raised by program staff:

- Implementing an experimental design was new to program staff and it took some time to understand the intricacies of such a design. For example, staff struggled with how to message the random assignment so that participants understood what it meant and still wanted to sign up despite potentially not being assigned to the actual program. SRDC and Achēv worked together to finetune the messaging.
- Recruiting participants was a challenge in which the pandemic has certainly played a role. The number of newcomers arriving to Canada has diminished from previous years because of the travel restrictions and the fear of Covid-19. Recruitment went well for the first few online cohorts – women were at home with limited other activities and the distance to the program location within the Greater Toronto Area was no longer an issue so there was an increase in potential candidates for the program. However, the number of participants recruited for each cohort are currently below target. To mitigate this, Achēv has adjusted their random assignment ratio to 75/25 from 50/50 to allow for cohorts to run with sufficient participants.
- Building relationships with employers takes time and resources, which is something that staff who are involved in other aspects of delivering the program may not have the time to focus on. Staff mentioned that the program might have been best served by having a designated employer liaison or job developer whose job would be to solely focus on employers and recruitment and building those relationships.

What's working well

Overall, the program implementation has run smoothly so far. Staff mentioned the following aspects as working particularly well:

- The workshops around essential skills and, especially the exercise in which participants compare their skill levels with those needed for their target occupation helped participants to better understand the types of skills needed in their occupation of interest in Canada. These workshops also helped some of the participant in recognizing the skills that they have and in which areas they might benefit from upskilling to meet the skills needed in their target occupation.

- The program met women's need when it came to preparing them for the Canadian job market. Staff mentioned that seeing participants get employed in good jobs or going into further education was rewarding. As summarized by a staff member, *"the training is meeting their needs, they're learning, they're networking and getting jobs ... we're seeing them on LinkedIn, get jobs, and celebrate that. The success stories are probably when you think, this is important work. This is working. This model works."*
- The shift to offering a virtual program was highlighted as particularly successful. It showed that these types of employment program can be offered online. As stated by a staff member, *"it shows that online training and coaching support is effective and will likely be more of the future offering in terms of services and program support needed. But it could easily complement, in-person or in-class type of program as well."*
- By delivering the program in cohorts, women are brought together and get to connect. A staff mentioned that it can help to remove the isolation that some of the participants face as newcomers in Canada. One staff stated seeing that, through their interactions, women are *"learning, growing, and they're meeting new friends."* To further support that need to connect, Achēv has created a MeetUp group for women to connect around a predetermined topic such as *How to Tell Your Story* and *Speak for Success*.

On women-only cohorts: *"And I think it allows them a place outside of their home and their family responsibilities and their relationships to really just be them and to focus on their professional life, to meet new friends, and express themselves in a way that is hard in the home because they're so busy parenting and some of them come from more traditional backgrounds, and have certain responsibilities that other women born and raised in Canada ... like they have a lot of responsibilities in addition to being highly educated and skilled, and career driven."* (program staff)

ACCES Employment — Career Pathways for Newcomer Women

Description of the intervention

ACCES adapted Model 2 to include the six-tiered delivery model that they use in their bridging programs. Their program, *Career Pathways for Newcomer Women*, is different than their sector-specific programs because it not focused on a particular occupation. As such, it fills a gap for women who would not fit in the other bridging programs. The program is comprised of

five weeks of employment readiness training applying the essential skills framework. Participants are also provided with opportunities to connect with employers and are supported through one-on-one coaching.

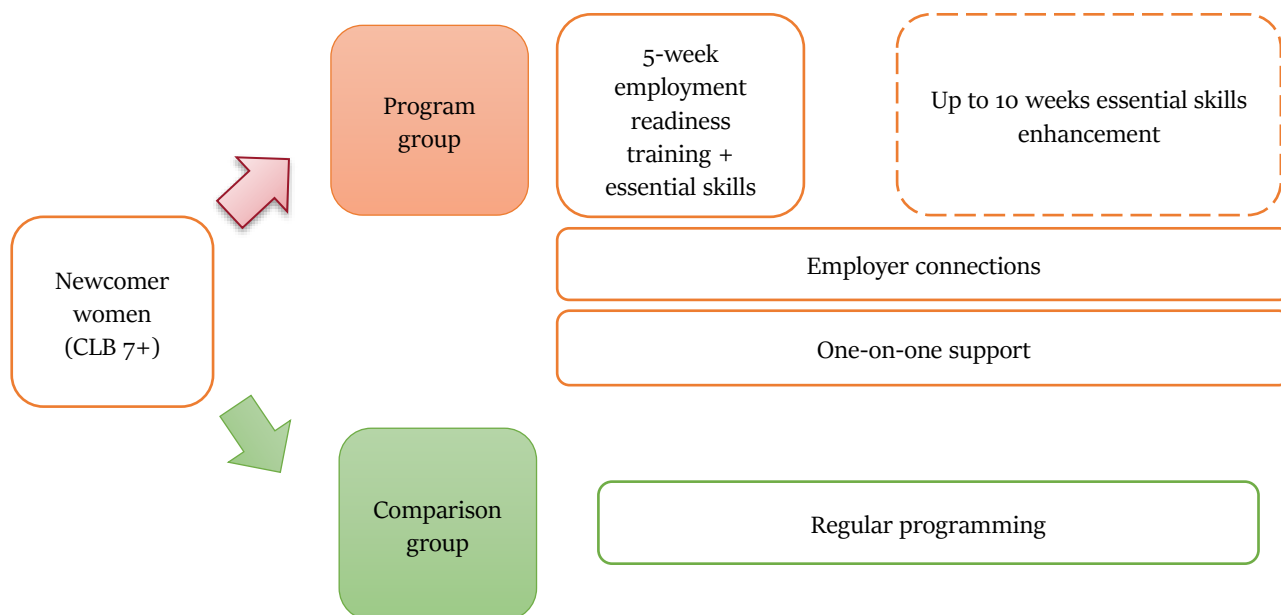
ACCES adopted a quasi-experimental research design for this program which means that they will also recruit 160 clients with similar characteristics from the pool of participants who are accessing their Ontario Employment Centre to form the comparison group.

Table 20 **Summary of ACCES' Career Pathways for Newcomer Women program**

Career Pathways for Newcomer Women by ACCES Employment	
Model	Model 2
Region served	GTA
Length of formal program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 weeks
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible minority newcomer women Postsecondary degree holder Canadian Language Benchmark 7 or higher Permanent Resident or Convention Refugee
Target number of participants	160 program; 160 comparison
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	108
Agreement period	August 2019 to September 2021
Research design	Quasi-experimental

Figure 20 depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each component of the program is described below.

Figure 20 Career Pathways for Newcomer Women process diagram



- **Employment readiness training** — Throughout the five weeks of group training, the emphasis is on agility and adaptability as ACCES believes that these are foundational skills that will serve clients in their employment journey. As ACCES staff stated, it keeps “*clients open to the possibility to really expand their horizons of possibility and to build that awareness where they can picture themselves in different environments and different situations and be confident in how they would react and perform in those situations because they’ve built this different mindset.*”

ACCES developed the training to engage and foster discussion. Every workshop has a participation component and aims to foster interactions between participants so that when they leave the program, they have created some networks. ACCES staff explained their pedagogy for this program: “*We took old school pedagogy and we tossed it. We no longer speak to people and say, take this information, consume it and then regurgitate it when you get to a workplace. It’s learner engagement. It’s ... teaching people how to get comfortable with discomfort.*”

As part of the five-week program, participants develop an essential skills portfolio which is introduced fairly early into the program and answers the following questions “*What do I think I can do? How do I know that I can do that? And how do I communicate to somebody that I can do it?*” They then present it to their peers.

- Essential skills** — ACCES has experience in using a future skills framework for their bridging programs. For this program, they combined the future skills deemed relevant by industry advisors with the essential skills to ensure that the content is relevant and useful to participants. The five-week training program is rooted in essential skills and connected to participants' goals. As ACCES staff pointed out, they are “not just teaching essential skills for the sake of teaching essential skills.” For example, *“So where we have something like document use. Kind of in a very dry format of essential skills, you could go in and you could say, today we’re going to practise essential skill document use. You could talk about it in a very kind of detached manner. What we’ve done is instead of that we’ve said we’re going to have activities that directly prepare you for securing and retaining work and being promoted at work. And where that includes the essential skills that’s woven in and integrated. And we know all about that framework on the delivery side. We want the client to focus solely on the employment readiness and employment success. And so what they see from their side is everything about employment, everything about modern workplace, that kind of future skills they need to develop what workplaces are and how and how they’re changing and how they’re going to continue to change. And then we are coming back and looking at the development of those skills. But we’re doing it all within the context of the application of those skills towards the goals of the participants in the project.”*

The focus on essential skills does not end with the training program. Staff and clients create a plan to continue improving their skills. As part of their upskilling, participants are provided with links from the essential skills assessment platform. The action plan, as described by staff, *“acts as a touchpoint in later processes as we’re continuing to work with clients on employment after the end of the program as well as the program wraps up.”*

- One-on-one coaching** — Throughout the program and for one year afterwards, participants can access one-on-one coaching to help them in applying for jobs, getting their resumes adapted for the job, and preparing for interviews. Some clients also come back for support during their job search process. The amount of support varies from client to client — some people need more support than others. Coaches also help their clients access wrap-around supports. ACCES staff explained, *“You can’t actually deliver anything without looking at the whole picture of who that person is, what they’re going through and being able to do that wrap around process is really important to kind of service the needs of what that participant is going through at that time. Beyond obviously getting them employed is the goal and we want them to retain that employment but looking at how they can actually do that with everything else going on in their lives, and being able to provide the support and having the opportunity to do that.”*
- Employer engagement** — All ACCES programs have a connection with employers because, as staff said, *“it’s the cornerstone to our model, right? It all starts and ends with industry engagement.”* Employer connections can be found on two levels for this program. At the

project level, staff are engaging with employers to create opportunities for program participants, whether it be through inviting employers as guest speakers or by connecting a client to an opportunity. At the organization level, the program is supported by the corporate engagement department which involves broader engagement with employers which can also benefit program participants by providing opportunities to tap into organization-wide recruitment events. This broader engagement also helps ACCES to *keep “a finger close to the pulse with industries, who’s telling us exactly what they need.”* Being able to access a broad base of employers is useful because of the variety of career paths of CPNW clients. Staff have mentioned that employer engagement takes a lot of work and resources.

Modifications

Due to the pandemic, ACCES had to pivot to online service delivery. Following are the modifications that they made to their program.

- Since the start of the pandemic, the program has shifted from an in-person program to one that is delivered online. ACCES was well-prepared to make the transition to online delivery. For example, even before the pandemic, video interviews were included in the curriculum. Staff have found that requiring that everyone be on camera has helped to form bonds. This has meant being comfortable with other people popping on camera from time to time and has allowed participants and staff to attend the training in an authentic way. Staff emphasized the importance of being flexible and going with the flow, especially during these unprecedented times: *“It’s extending that kindness all around that we can and making sure they know that, that we appreciate everything that they’re doing and that we’re going to support them as they keep moving forward, despite whatever difficulties we run into along the way.”*
- To address isolation and stressors of the day, ACCES added a conversation piece in the morning to allow everyone the opportunity to check in and to talk about life events and the ever-evolving situation. As another way of checking in, staff always reached out to participants if they missed some sessions to see how they were doing.

Aside from the modifications due to COVID-19, delivery staff are always refining and improving the programming based on previous cohorts. Moreover, the activities are always adapted to the cohort to ensure that they speak to the women who are enrolled at that time.

Challenges

One of the only challenges raised by staff in implementing this program was recruiting comparison group members. ACCES opted for a quasi-experimental design which means that the comparison group is not recruited through random assignment, but by recruiting clients that

would be eligible for, but that are not enrolled in, the program. Initially, the division between the program and comparison group participants was based on a geographic distribution which meant that comparison group participants were to be recruited from ACCES centres where the program was not offered. This would have allowed for a clear separation between the two pool of participants. When the program went online, the geographical boundary disappeared and ACCES had to rethink how they were going to recruit clients into the comparison group. Ultimately, ACCES ended up recruiting similar clients from their Employment Ontario centre and clients for which the timing of the program was not convenient.

What worked well

Overall, implementation of the pilot has been successful. Staff raised the following areas as ones that have worked particularly well:

- One reason offered by ACCES management for the successful implementation of the program is that the team is a really strong one — indeed, it is one of the most specialized program teams at ACCES.
- The transition to online programming went smoothly. Staff mentioned that having a clear program map and program plan from which to work from really helped to structure the online program. ACCES also had some pre-existing infrastructure from their online pre-arrival programs on which they were able to build for this program. Once they settled on the tools that would meet the needs of the program and of the clients, they were ready to offer the program virtually.
- Including confidence building activities and ensuring the availability of safe spaces during the program was a feature that turned out to be important to participants, especially during the pandemic. These included bringing back alumni to showcase potential pathways to employment. As explained by a staff member, *“They need to feel empowered and they need to feel like this is not hopeless.”* Staff believes it’s important to bring in role models right from the beginning of the program; they explain it this way: *“They need to see that reflection, and for all of us, and even for myself as a woman of color and being somebody who was a newcomer here as well, never having seen that over the years and now having seen it more and more.”*
- Participants have appreciated developing a portfolio that showcases their skills as it helps them to understand all of the skills that they bring to an employer. As explained by staff, *“And I think for the participants as well, they also become very self-aware of who they are and what they can bring to the table in having to develop a portfolio.”*

- Bringing women together in women-only cohorts has fostered relationships between women, and, as staff highlighted, has helped to break the isolation that some of the participants experience. Women also feel a kinship and a connection to the other women in the program since they are in similar situations. In some cases, participants also help one another in their search for employment.

On women-only cohorts: *“So the fact that they’re able to form strong connections with other women in a safe environment and that all of our groups have formed WhatsApp groups, they have meet ups afterwards. They follow each other on LinkedIn. They do all of these things. And that creation of those social bonds within that learning environment and that learning community, I think it is a really big benefit to individuals because it extends what we can do. We can only do so much because we only have so much time as a whole group to work with each individual person. So wherever we can have three or four people in that classroom who are really picking up what we’re putting down and really changing that, and they share that outside of that formal classroom environment, that just multiplies the opportunities for learning and skills development. And several participants have mentioned it directly, that being able to take part in a women’s only program has given them a space to talk about things and address issues and share in ways that otherwise they wouldn’t be able to.”* (program staff)

ISANS — Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work

Description of the intervention

Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work is ISANS’s program based on Model 2. It provides participants with a six-week employment readiness training which includes, among other things, the ability for participants to take stock of the essential skills needed for their intended occupation, compare those with their own skills, and identify areas for enhancement. As part of the employment readiness training, participants also develop an essential skills portfolio. After the group training, staff support participants one-on-one to develop an action plan for their job search and for their self-guided essential skills enhancement. Throughout the program, ISANS aims to connect participants with employers.

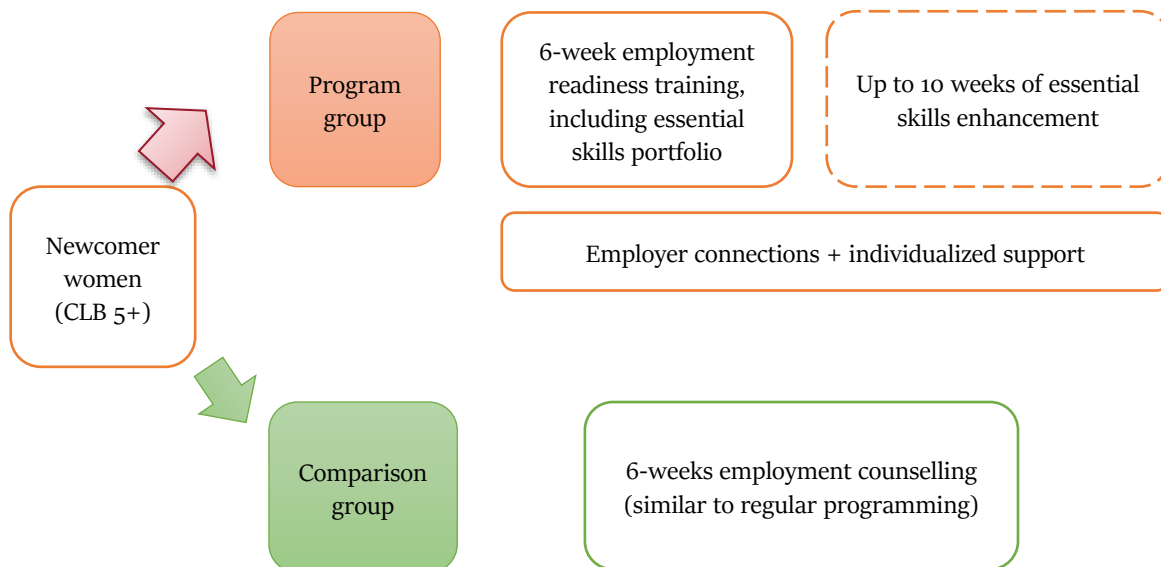
An experimental design was adopted as the research design which means that eligible participants are randomly assigned either to the program group and can take part in the program or to the comparison group and are then referred to six weeks of employment counselling offered by an ISANS staff who works only with the comparison group clients.

Table 21 **Summary of ISANS' Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work program**

Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work by ISANS	
Model	Model 2
Region served	Halifax Regional Municipality
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-week portfolio building and career planning ▪ Essential skills enhancement referral and support ▪ Individualized support
Length of formal program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 16 weeks
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ Have a postsecondary education ▪ Have a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) of 5+
Target number of participants	120 program; 120 comparison
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	80
Agreement period	August 2019 to September 2021
Research design	Experimental design

Figure 21 below depicts the flow of a participant in the program. Each program component is explored below.

Figure 21 Visible Minority Newcomer Women at Work process diagram



- Essential skills** — The program is guided by the Government of Canada’s essential skills framework. Essential skills are explored throughout the program in a number of ways. During the employment readiness training, two weeks are dedicated to essential skills. The first two days in the group training are spent on introducing essential skills, defining them, and explaining why they are important to employers and to job seekers. Then they use the essential skills profiles to compare their scores with the scores needed for their intended occupation — the goal is to identify where the skills match and where there may be gaps. Participants then develop an occupation-specific essential skills profile in class that they will later present to their peers. After doing the portfolio, participants identify three skill enhancing goals. The skills enhancement piece is mostly self-led and can involve taking additional training, attending online training on LinkedIn Learning for example, attending computer training at ISANS, or doing volunteering or job shadowing. ISANS has not been sharing the links that are included in the assessment platform. ISANS can further support participants in taking short gap training through provincial funding.
- Employment readiness training** — Six-week group training (three hours a day, Monday to Friday) that covers soft skills (including self-confidence, assertive communication, gender equality, learning to deal with change and financial literacy), essential skills, and job search strategies (resume and cover letter writing, interview etiquette and interview skills, networking, fitting in, and employment contracts).

- **Employer engagement and individualized support** — Individualized employment engagement support is offered starting after the six-week training, which involves connecting them with employers of interest, recommending them for jobs or referring them to job fairs or information sessions. Initially, this type of support was offered in group sessions, but it was a challenge to meet the diverse needs of participants, so an individualized approach was adopted. Providing this individualized support takes time and resources which were not always available due to limited staffing. In September 2020, ISANS identified that, since employer engagement was important for participants to find jobs, it needed to be bolstered by hiring a job developer whose role would be to further engage with participants in their search for employment. ISANS implemented plans to host virtual job fairs for participants starting with an event in November 2020.

The comparison group gets support in the area of employer engagement similar to programming that they would get through the regular career counselling which includes a needs assessment and the development of an action plan. The counsellor then provides support in job search strategies and career exploration, among other things. The main difference is that it is offered in a more narrow and condensed way.

Modifications

Similar to other service partners, ISANS has had to adapt their program for virtual delivery due to the pandemic, as follows:

- ISANS shifted to online delivery of the program and the shift required adaptation from the program staff to ensure that the program was well-suited to this new mode of delivery. The curriculum had to be adapted from in-person group-based activities to virtual interactions. Initially the portfolio was done on paper, but with the online delivery, the portfolio also shifted to a digital copy, which, in hindsight, ended up being better.
- The revised structure of the program and online programming gave participants more flexibility to attend while also attending to their other responsibilities such as taking care of children. Staff mentioned that this was especially true at the height of the pandemic when everyone had to stay home. Attending the program from their home also removed the issue of childcare for some women.
- ISANS is hoping for a blended program for future cohorts. Staff believe that participants would benefit from some portions of the program to continue being offered online since the digital literacy skills that they obtain can further support them in finding employment.

In addition to those modifications due to the pandemic, ISANS has made the following changes to its program implementation and delivery:

- Initially, the program was designed to be seven weeks long, with the last week focused on digital skills training, but not all participants wanted to focus on this aspect of their skills. ISANS staff made the decision to shorten the program to six weeks to give participants more flexibility to focus on the essential skills enhancement in areas of their choice. Those who wanted to focus on digital upskilling as part of their plan were instead referred to computer courses at ISANS.
- Another cohort was added in October to make up for previous cohorts that were smaller than intended due to some recruitment issues related to the reduction of newcomers who landed in Nova Scotia since the start of the pandemic.
- The order of the delivery of the three components in the employment readiness training program changed. Staff found that what worked best for clients for to focus first on employability skills then on essential skills and to end with job search strategy as they found that these build onto one another.

Challenges

ISANS staff identified recruitment as the main challenge they experienced in delivering the program. Recruitment of participants for this program has been a challenge for a number of reasons. The pandemic certainly had an impact — indeed, fewer people landed in Nova Scotia during 2020 and therefore, the pool of new clients was substantially reduced. ISANS staff also mentioned that since the program cannot serve Canadian citizens or international students, it further reduced the pool of eligible participants. In addition, the wait times between cohorts may have discouraged some potential participants. As explained by a program staff, “when people are looking for jobs, anybody, they want to start now” and that was not always possible in this program. The fact that this was a research project and involved many steps to sign on might have deterred others.

What worked well

Overall, staff were satisfied with the overall delivery of the program, and they identified the following components as working particularly well:

- The fact that the program is all encompassing provides visible minority newcomer women with the skills, confidence, and tools needed to find and keep good quality jobs. It allows participants to aim for their dream job, not just for a transitional job. In the end, the aim of

the program as described by staff is to equip participants with the skills, knowledge, and resources that they need to become successful independent jobseekers.

On defining success of this program: *“because at first, the end goal is always help the client get the job. But then once you start working with them and you start getting to know them more on a personal level and understanding their journey, you’re thinking I don’t want to get you any job, I want to get you your dream job. So let’s work towards that. No, you’re not going to apply to this transitional job. You’re going to apply to this. This is what I believe you can do and giving them that courage and that support, as (another program staff) mentioned, believing in them that they can accomplish that because it’s easy to just get them any job. But the hard thing is to get them the job that they are looking for and the one that’s most compatible with their skills and their experience.”* (program staff)

- Women found it useful to better understand the skills that they bring to the table, and areas in which they have gaps. Since they are the ones identifying the gaps, it is a good way to empower them in their job search and to allow them to be in control of their future. It is also useful as interview preparation because they can go back to their portfolio to provide specific examples of when they have applied these skills. As explained by ISANS staff, the portfolio is *“more like for them and for their own development and for their own growth”* than to show employers. Some participants learn new skills or improve their digital skills while developing their portfolio. One of the reasons why the program is longer than others is that participants are given class time to develop their portfolio, which according to the program staff, is a critical piece of the training.

On the usefulness of developing an essential skills portfolio: *“I think the main thing they learn is their self-confidence because it goes up because they start to see their skills and especially the skills related to their career. And once they start to see the gaps of, this is the area where I need to focus and work on in order to improve myself and to be a better candidate for employers, that’s when they see the benefit. And then also they kind of do the preparation work prior to going into the job search strategies portion because they already have thought out about, these are the skills that I have and these are the places where I’ve used them and these are some examples of how I’ve applied them. So when we get to the interview section, it’s more like, when we’re learning about how to answer behavioral questions, I say, you’re having trouble thinking of a time when you exercise time management. So let’s go back to your portfolio. What are some places where you apply time management in these roles and what are the examples that you listed there? Can we talk about that and how can we make that example sound great to employers in terms of how it was beneficial and how it added value?”* (program staff)

- The program has also had positive impacts for ISANS. Staff mentioned that being involved in this pilot project has built the capacity of ISANS in two aspects:
 - Targeted programming for visible minority newcomer women: this has created an opportunity to develop curriculum and resources that positions ISANS to provide stronger supports for this target group of clients.
 - Building ISANS' internal capacity to integrate the essential skills framework into their programming has allowed them to develop resources and curriculum that can then be shared with other teams.

YWCA Metro Vancouver — Elevate Skills

Description of intervention

YWCA Metro Vancouver is piloting two models — Elevate Skills (Model 2) and Aspire (Model 4). This section explores how YWCA Metro Vancouver implemented Model 2.

Elevate Skills is a 16-week program that provides participants in Metro Vancouver with three weeks of portfolio building and career development training, up to 10 weeks of essential skills enhancement training, weekly group meetings and up to six one-to-one meetings for 13 weeks, and employer engagement activities throughout the 16 weeks. Employer engagement activities were only provided to cohorts six to 10 in order to test its impact on participant outcomes.

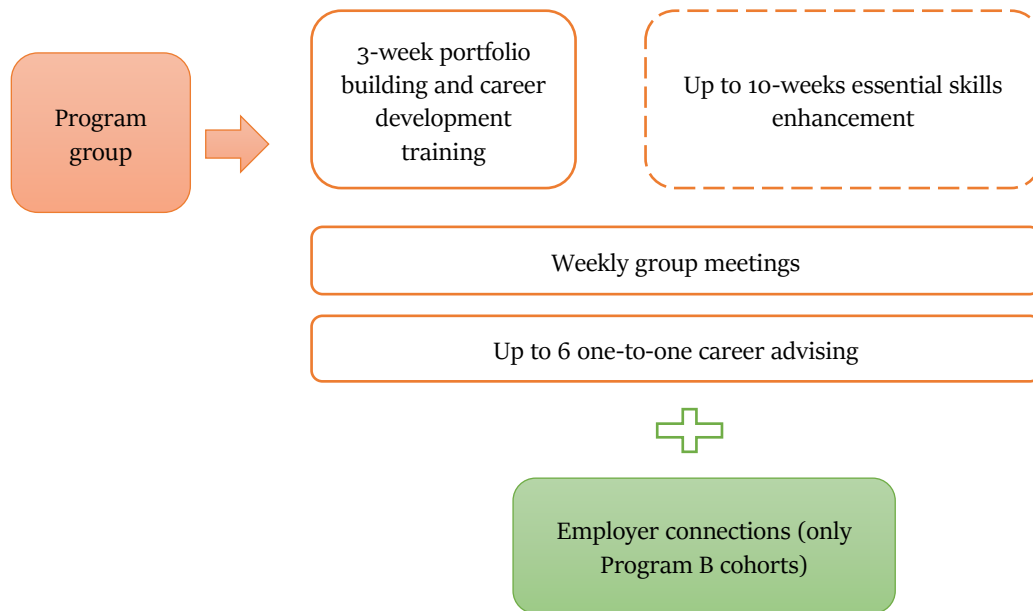
The research design adopted for this intervention is a case study design which means that all potential participants are invited to participate in the program (i.e., no comparison group). However, to assess employer engagement, the program has two streams: one in which participants are connected with employers, and the other one, in which they are not.

Table 22 **Summary of YWCA's Elevate Skills program**

Elevate Skills by YWCA Metro Vancouver	
Model	Model 2
Region served	Metro Vancouver region
Key program components	<p>A program with an essential skills framework that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3-week portfolio building and career development training ▪ Up to 10 weeks of essential skills enhancement if appropriate ▪ Weekly group meetings <p>One-to-one career advising</p>
Length of formal program	Up to 13 weeks
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ Postsecondary education
Target number of participants	140
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	99
Agreement period	July 2019 to July 2021
Research design	Case study design (no comparison group)

Figure 22 depicts the flow of a participant in the program. Each of the program components is explored in detail below.

Figure 22 Elevate Skills process diagram



- Portfolio-building and career development training** — The first part of the program is a three-week (five days a week, from 9:30 am to 2 p.m.) training that focuses on essential skills and career planning, job search strategies, cultural intelligence including communication, workplace culture, financial empowerment, and employment standards. Participants' essential skills are assessed to help them gain a better understanding of the skills they have and how to articulate them in the job search process, as well as to identify skills they want to work on based on essential skills profiles. Participants also develop and present an essential skills portfolio. The program delivered services to seven cohorts so far — first three cohorts were delivered in person, and the other four were delivered online.
- Essential skills enhancement** — For participants with essential skills gaps based on their assessment and their target occupation, staff recommend additional training and activities over 13 weeks.
- Success team meetings** — Weekly success team meetings provide participants with the opportunity to set goals for the upcoming week and reflect on their activities from the past week. It also creates the space for participants in each cohort to discuss their challenges and support one another, as well as share and celebrate any job search progress achieved within the group. Sometimes success team meetings are held jointly with the preceding or following cohort, so the women have the opportunity to network with other participants outside their

own cohort as well. Guest speakers have also been invited to success team meetings starting with cohort 5.

- **One-to-one career advising** — During the one-on-one sessions, participants are provided with their essential skills learning plans and identify with advisors the skills they want to improve. Referrals to training options are made at this stage. Women can also receive support with job applications and preparing for interviews.

One innovative of this model include the essential skills framework and the essential skills training offered to staff to enhance their organizational capacity.

- **Essential skills framework** — The essential skills framework is integrated throughout the training, skills enhancement, and one-to-one career advising sessions. The framework supports participants to better understand and communicate their skills to employers as well as develop a learning plan to improve on needed skills for their target occupation.

Modifications to the program

While implementation of the program is successful, several changes had to be made because of the pandemic:

- When the provincial government declared a state of emergency in British Columbia (BC) in March 2020, the Elevate Skills team quickly pivoted to online service delivery. They have been delivering an online program since then. They began delivering the program using GoToMeeting, and then transitioned to Zoom. The format of the online training also changed to allow for participants to take a longer break between the morning and afternoon sessions, where they would be assigned some work to do on their own, rather than have the facilitator and participants be together the whole time as with the in-person training. The online training schedule changed to 10 to 11 a.m, and then 2 to 3 p.m.
- Participants from earlier cohorts who were no longer receiving support from the program requested an opportunity to connect with one another on a regular basis. Elevate Skills added Meaningful Conversations to their program as a result of these requests. Starting in May 2020, staff organized a weekly one-hour meeting where participants across cohorts could meet to discuss topics including self-care, challenges, and stories of resilience. Staff described feedback that she received from one of the participants: *“She said it gives her a sense of emotional security. She felt like she always had someone to share her thoughts with without judgment. And she said something interesting. She said it fills the immigration gap. Finding a social circle and connecting emotionally. And she said this kind of social circle is invaluable and that settling in a country is not just about employment, but how this has been really valuable for her. It wasn’t planned. It came out from the women requesting it. And it’s*

really kind of participants centric, like either they facilitate or they dictate what topics to be discussed. So it's really interesting."

- Staff have adapted the content of the program to reflect participant needs during the pandemic. For example, they provide tips for online interviewing, as well as information about resources and supports that were created in response to the pandemic, such as accessing free counselling services or CERB.

Unrelated to the pandemic, starting with the fifth cohort, program staff began inviting guest speakers to the Success Team Meetings. This change was to encourage participant attendance and to offer more diverse perspectives.

Challenges

Staff have noted the following challenges in the delivery of this program:

- For both the in-person and online cohorts, childcare issues have been significant. Staff discussed the difficulty they had in finding viable childcare options for participants when the program was offered in-person. They do not have room for on-site childcare and were not able to pay the childcare provider for just the short amount of time needed for the training, so participants either faced unmet childcare needs or continued to pay out of pocket for existing childcare while participating in the program.
- Not all participants had access to the stable internet or computer equipment needed to facilitate their participation in the online cohorts. While program staff could lend out laptops to participants and provide funding for Internet, they found it logistically challenging to get the laptops to participants since transporting the laptops could not be covered by IRCC funding. Staff were also not able to find a simple temporary Internet solution that could be cancelled once the program had ended.

What's working well

Staff have been satisfied with the program implementation to date and with the preliminary effects on women. Specifically, they mentioned:

- The switch to online service delivery has been beneficial in several ways. Participant recruitment has been easier due to their ability to include participants with children at home or who would not have participated due to transportation barriers. Although their site is located in Metro Vancouver (Port Coquitlam), it is not the most accessible location by public transit. It has also made it easier for employers to engage with participants through guest speaking and continue to participate in employer engagement throughout multiple cohorts,

since the time commitment is lower without having to travel to attend in person. Regarding employer engagement, staff said, *“Our employers just keep wanting to come back. They’re really enjoying it and they’re really wanting to give back to the community. So for them, they find this as their way of volunteering.”*

- The cohort-based format has also allowed participants to make connections with one another, relate to one another, and build confidence. Staff described an important transformation that happens with participants: *“I think that one of the main things that has worked well in this program that I’ve seen every cohort is that irrespective of the employment nature of this program, the program builds confidence. And I think that’s huge. The program builds confidence in these women in so many ways that really addresses and actually disrupts the systemic barriers that are placed on them.”* Participants are empowered through sharing similar experiences and also learning how to identify and communicate about their skills and strengths to employers.
- During the program development phase, Elevate Skills staff were invited along with other Model 2 staff to participate in essential skills training led by Douglas College. This training provided them with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the essential skills framework and how they could integrate it into their programs. The training also increased the level of expertise among program staff, who were then eligible to receive the Essential Skills Practitioner Training Certificate after completing additional online modules following the in-person training.

On the cohort-based format: *“The cohort nature of the workshops really is the main [thing]. Without that, this program would be very different. It’s something that, they’re all immigrant women, wherever they’re coming from, facing similar challenges, and they often will say, I thought I was the only one. But you don’t unless you put a face to that situation, you don’t really think about that. So that cohort nature, that group nature of the program, if we didn’t continue that, I think it would really diminish the value that we can add to these women.... It’s also for them to help each other out and encourage each other, share resources. Maybe some other women have found work or some of the women have had an informational interview and they can share it with the rest of the group or really encourage each other and support each other.”* (program staff)

World Skills — Empowering Newcomer Women

Description of the intervention

World Skills is piloting Models 2 and 3 as part of the Empowering Newcomer Women program. These are described together because they have many components in common. Differences will be highlighted throughout. Modifications, challenges and what worked well will be presented for each model separately.

Empowering Newcomer Women is World's Skills' program for visible minority newcomer women. In general, potential participants are streamed into Model 2 if they have lower English levels (CLB 5–6) and those with higher English levels are streamed into Model 3. Both programs offer employment readiness training, connections with employers, mentoring through the Circle of Champions, and a self-leadership series. Model 2 has a special focus on essential skills using the framework developed by the Government of Canada and is targeted towards women who are further away from the labour market. Model 3 focuses on matching participants with commensurate employment and is targeted to women who are almost ready to enter the labour market and need some Canadian workplace preparation training.

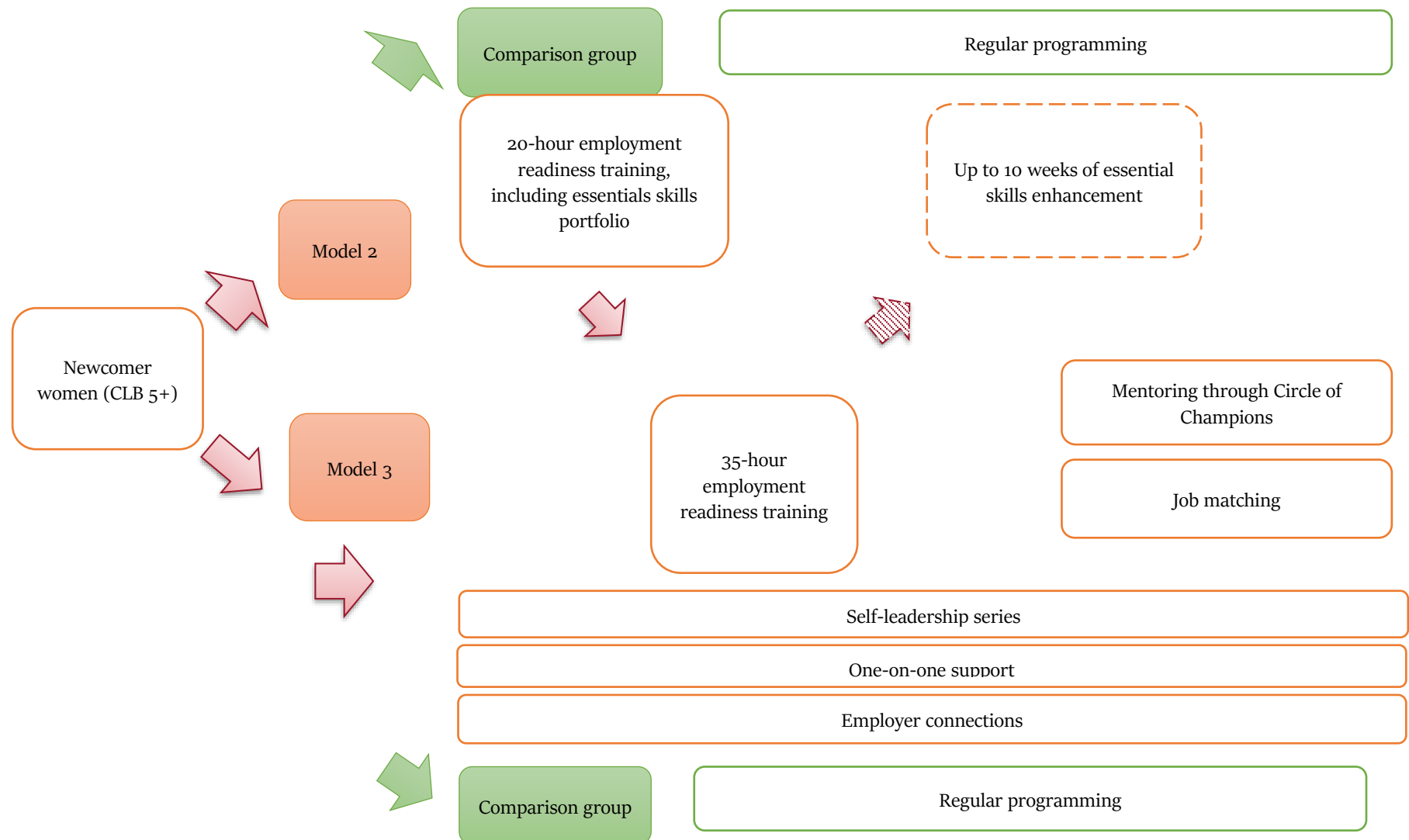
Both models use an experimental research design which means that, once streamed into the appropriate model, eligible participants are randomly assigned either to the program group and can take part in the program or to the comparison group and are then referred to other services at World Skills.

Table 23 Summary of World Skills' Empowering Newcomer Women program

Empowering Newcomer Women by World Skills	
Model	Model 2 and Model 3
Region served	Ottawa
Key program components	<p>Common components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 35-hour employment readiness training ▪ Employer connections/ job matching ▪ Mentoring through the Circle of Champions ▪ Self-leadership series ▪ One-on-one support <p>Specific to Model 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An additional 20-hour employment readiness training, which includes the development of an essential skills portfolio ▪ Essential skills enhancement recommendations
Length of formal program	<p>10 days for Model 2</p> <p>5 days for Model 3</p>
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ Must be unemployed or underemployed ▪ CLB level 5+ (CLB 5–6: Model 2; CLB 7+: Model 3)
Target number of participants	For each model: ~200-250 program; ~200–250 comparison
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	<p>56 — Model 2</p> <p>154 — Model 3</p>
Agreement period	July 2019 to September 2021
Research design	Experimental design

Figure 23 depicts the flow of a participant in the program. Each program component is explored further below.

Figure 23 Empowering Newcomer Women process diagram



- **Employment readiness training** – Participants in Model 2 take part in 55 hours of training over a two-week period, while Model 3 participants take part in 35 hours of training. The first week is exclusive to Model 2 participants, while for the remaining week, Model 2 and Model 3 are merged. Topics covered during the 35-hour employment readiness training include resume writing, interview skills, career mapping, networking, using LinkedIn, and creating a job action plan and are mostly offered by external guest speakers who are experts in that area (except for workshops on essential skills). The workshops focus on practical aspects of job search so that participants can apply them in their own process. As explained by staff, the program aims to provide opportunities to empower participants, provide them inspiration and practical tips, and to have time for reflection.
- **Essential skills (Model 2 only)** – An innovative aspect of Model 2 is its focus on essential skills. They are first discussed with participants during the pre-program meeting in which they discuss the clients' experience and employment goals. As part of this meeting, staff also go over the results of the skill assessments with clients. The first week of the program is focused on essential skills with two days spent presenting the essential skills framework and the nine essential skills. Participants then explore the essential skills required in their intended occupation by looking at the job profiles developed by the Government of Canada. After that, the essential skills portfolio is introduced, and participants start developing their own with the goal of highlighting their experience related to essential skills and to incorporate branding elements. They continue developing it on their own with support from staff during drop-in sessions with the aim of presenting it to their Model 2 peers on the last day of the training.

After the in-class training, staff and clients discuss areas in which clients want to enhance their skills. In terms of essential skill enhancement, World Skills recommends that participants explore the links that are provided in the assessment platform; however, staff have found that participants want to partake in more formal courses such as workplace language training or computer courses.

- **Employer connections** – While the way in which employer connections are established have changed because of the online nature of the program, World Skills staff remained committed to fostering connections between employers and participants. Participants are invited to participate in three types of activities: informational interviews with employers of interest, a small group networking events or coaching events where a professional or employer and participants interact, and targeted recruitment events.
- **Job matching** – In Model 3, World Skills staff connect with employers to seek employment opportunities for participants, understand their needs, connect them with qualified candidates, and follow up after job matches. Activities completed by the recruitment specialist as part of this engagement piece can be grouped into three categories:

1. Awareness building involves letting employers know about the program and World Skills' role in connecting employers with qualified candidates.
2. Monthly targeted recruitment events are an important way in which employers and participants can connect around specific employment opportunities.
3. Recruiting mentors to be part of the Circle of Champions.

In addition, the recruitment specialist works with organizations and associations to help their clients understand the different licenses/certifications required to help them succeed in the labour market.

Staff also work directly with participants to prepare them for employment. This includes helping clients understand the labour market, how to position themselves within it for success, and how to connect with employers through networking, LinkedIn, and cold calling. It also includes matching them with relevant opportunities from employers or referring them to staffing agencies.⁴² As part of the job matching process, clients are asked to identify ten employers for whom they are interested in working. From there, the recruitment specialist works to connect the client with, at least, some of those employers through various means such as informational interviews, targeted recruitment events, or by connecting clients to job postings that are aligned with their experience and goals.

Describing the cold calling activity: "We've added another workshop called Cold Calling where we teach them actually to phone employers. And again, it's the permission piece of doing that more than the skill itself. But we help them with the dialogue and the whole aspect of that. And then we've changed the LinkedIn piece from just doing a nice LinkedIn profile, but turning LinkedIn from a profile to a networking opportunity. And turning that from just networking online to actual contacts, so we teach them how to do a call to reach out on LinkedIn, and that turned that into an information interview, teach them how to build that into an ongoing relationship and so on. So it's permission. It's teaching. It's getting them as the supply to also go learn how to reach that market themselves. So when we're not around there, they're able to do it ongoing."
(program staff)

- **Individualized support** — Staff work with clients to develop an action plan that breaks down the steps of their job search process. As part of the individualized support, they support clients in their job search. Staff explained that during these conversations, roles and

⁴² One of the barriers clients face is obtaining their security clearance for jobs that require it. Staffing agencies are often better positioned to support clients in this process.

responsibilities for both staff and the client are established to increase accountability. In addition to developing the action plan, staff also support clients through preparing them for submitting resumes, interviews, and debriefing. Moreover, World Skills staff endorse clients' job applications by forwarding their resumes themselves with the hiring manager or by being a reference or recommendation for the client. Staff have found that this extra step helps clients obtain jobs. Support is offered for one year. If clients find jobs, they are referred to a retention support specialist for support during the first 100 days of their new job.

- **Circle of Champions** – This additional component was added to the Model 2 and 3 base components by World Skills in recognition of the importance of mentorship and networking to find a job in Canada. As explained by Model 3 staff, *“The idea was to connect women to people in our community, professionals who could help them get ahead because the statistics are also showing, mentoring is the number one way to employment for newcomers, and it’s not just in Canada. It’s globally, that those connections, that social capital is so important. So that was the inspiration for that, it’s to provide that support for women after the classroom as well, because we know that we can’t solve all the problems in the workshops and after the workshops, they still need to develop the connections in the community to get to know.”* At the end of the in-class training, clients are matched with a professional in a related sector for a period of, at least, three months. The role of the mentor is to provide support and guidance as the client looks for employment in the hopes of *“narrowing them that path and, shortening the time they’re spending looking for all kinds of information just to focus on their field or the field they want to continue to pursue.”* As explained by Model 2 staff, the mentorship *“complements the work that we’re doing in the initial stages and gives more like a wraparound kind of support.”* Mentors have also reported that they are benefiting from the relationship as well.

On developing an action plan as part of the individualized support: *“So part of what we do to formalize that process for the matching is at the conclusion of workshops, we do a one-on-one action plan. And so the employment counselor, the recruitment specialist part of that with the client and we kind of formalize roles and responsibilities. And there’s further clarification and specific job goal focus, again employers are identified, because sometimes it’s a shift as clients go through these programs in terms of their focus and decision making. Some of them come in thinking that what their ideal is sort of out of their view and then they bring it back into view. And then so through this formal meeting we have there’s clarification and an understanding on who’s going to do what and perform what action towards matching. So a client will identify, and I’ll reach out to these three employers and we formalize that process a bit to make that happen. I think that’s pretty important because that almost is again, it’s an agreement that just adds responsibility and accountability to the action.”* (Model 3 program staff)

- **Self-Leadership Series** — The self-leadership series is another program component that was added by World Skills to complement the core curriculum of the program. The focus is not on the job search aspect, but on personal and professional growth as a tool to empowerment and confidence building. Topics covered have included culture and communication, financial essentials, stress management, and managing negative self-talk. It is held as part of the two-week training. Participants from previous cohorts are invited to attend as well.

On the role of Champions in supporting clients' search for employment: *"So sometimes the particular protege, a participant of our program, may be looking for some additional guidance on things like resume or LinkedIn, if you know somebody with a more sector-specific knowledge can be helpful. But I know that some Champions, it becomes more of a personal support, like a resource for when the woman in our program is maybe struggling or having some challenges with the job search to go back to the protege. And then in other cases, it's been an opportunity to leverage the network of the Champions so the Champion will offer to make some introductions for the protege and help them get connected within their particular field in the community."* (program staff)

Modifications

Some of the modifications that World Skills implemented were common to both models.

- When the pandemic hit, both models transitioned to virtual delivery fairly seamlessly. This allowed World Skills to expand its recruitment pool to include potential participants who may not yet live in Ottawa⁴³ but have identified Ottawa as a potential labour market for their skills. One of the main areas of the program that had to be modified due to the pandemic was employer engagement. Prior to March 2020, in-person hiring events and targeted recruitment events were the main activities under employer engagement. Once the program moved online, the focus shifted to creating connections virtually. Another engagement activity in which participants went in-person to employers' premises to connect with them without prearranged appointments shifted to cold calling and learning how to leverage their LinkedIn profiles into networking opportunities. In terms of the curriculum, staff have now added a workshop on succeeding in virtual interviews. Moreover, employment coaches had to adapt their labour market outreach due to some economic sectors slowing down, while others were doing better.

⁴³ Potential participants already arrived in Canada.

- Program staff noted that some of the participants from Model 3 would have benefitted from the essential skills portion of Model 2. This realization in addition to recruitment challenges for Model 2 has led to new eligibility criteria that goes beyond CLB levels. Factors considered include looking to transition to a different type of job; being out of the labour market for over one year; recent graduates from university; not having work experience in Canada.
- Combining Model 2 and Model 3 participants for some of the training — initially, Model 2 and Model 3 were delivered separately. The decision to combine 35 hours of training with the Model 3 program allowed for the smaller cohorts of Model 2 participants to interact with other women in similar situations and it allowed for economies of scale in the delivery of the program.
- In terms of training content, a session on workplace culture in Canada was added after noticing a need for this from participants. Due to the toll of the pandemic, there has been a particular focus on mental health, self-care, and the well-being of the whole individual.

In addition to the changes above, Model 2 shifted the week on essential skills from the second week of training to the first week. This allowed participants to understand what they brought in terms of skills and experience which, in turn, led to participants gaining confidence before they joined Model 3 participants.

Model 3 also underwent some changes, as follows:

- The initial Model 3 program was held over five days. However, in the second year, program staff shifted from calculating the length of the program in days to hours. Now the program is 35 hours long.
- World Skills added a cohort for underemployed participants. This came from the realization that some eligible women were not able to participate during the day because they were employed. The underemployed cohort was held weeknights and weekends and addressed the specific issues related to looking for a job in their intended occupation while being underemployed as well as other topics such as negotiating a raise and moving up within an organization.

Challenges

Staff highlighted challenges common to both models.

- Staff identified that the eligibility criteria for the program might have been too broad. Participants with varying degrees of employment experiences and years spent in Canada joined the program. Participants who had just recently arrived in Canada were grouped with participants who had been residing in Canada for a longer time, who had already attended

other programs and trainings. Staff perceived that it affected participants' outcomes, as it could influence the confidence of those participants who took longer than others to find employment.

- Irregular attendance in the online program by participants became an issue in the latter half of the year. Many participants missed sessions because of childcare responsibilities, children requiring virtual school support, part-time employment during the program, or being unable to find privacy in the home to partake in the program. Staff reminded participants of the importance of regular attendance for learning and also provided opportunities to attend make-up sessions or cover missed topics during their one-on-one coaching sessions.
- Staff experienced difficulties keeping participants motivated to find employment during the pandemic, as many were concerned about working outside their homes with regular social contact. As explained by one staff, "And when you have that other worry, your ability to focus on something else is going to be impacted." Staff also saw a decline in hiring in many sectors, which contributed to the difficulty of participants successfully finding employment. Furthermore, due to the lockdown, staff faced difficulties in reconnecting with participants who had already finished the program and noted that the English language skills of those participants had decreased over time. This difficulty hindered participants' ability to express themselves during job interviews.

Model 2 staff highlighted two core challenges in implementing their program:

- Lower number of participants than expected was seen in each of the cohorts. A small number of participants in each cohort meant that there were lower opportunities for participants to practice and improve their English language skills, as well as networking and group job search opportunities. To ease recruitment challenges, staff worked to attract women from other programs within their organization, as well as focus on recruiting Francophone women. Staff also merged participants from World Skills Model 3 program with those in the Model 2 program for the first five days of the Workshop Series to help provide participants with a wholesome learning experience.
- Explaining essential skills to clients was found to be difficult at first for staff because it was not something that they were used to doing. Now that they have run many cohorts, they have adapted the content to participants' needs.

Model 3 staff highlighted that one of the only challenges they experienced in implementing the program was finding a way to best accommodate participants' busy schedules. Underemployed participants in the program required additional time and support to complete their activities, because of multiple responsibilities of working, family life and completing the program. To support these women, staff scheduled shorter one-on-one meetings, as well as offering to meet with participants in the evenings and on weekends.

What worked well

In general, both models have been implemented successfully in meeting the needs of participants. Staff mentioned that some of the key components that are common to both models have been working especially well:

- The program was able to move to an online delivery seamlessly. Staff were able to deliver training and cover the curriculum similarly compared to in-person delivery of the program. Staff learned that they were able to successfully continue with many of the same workshops and events that would have been offered to clients in an in-person delivery of the program. It was particularly helpful that the site's management team were engaged and supportive in the transition to an online program delivery. One of the reasons why the program has been successfully implemented, particularly during the online transition of the program, was because of the qualified experience, enthusiasm, and passion from staff. Staff noted that participants appreciated the quality of support they were able to receive from the staff when they were transitioning to online programming.
- Delivering the program online was effective and expanded the program's reach to more interested women who could join the program. Online programming provided a lot of flexibility for the staff and participants, as staff were easily able to accommodate participants if they missed a session. Participants were still able to connect with each other successfully as well. Staff noticed that participants connected with each other outside of the program through WhatsApp groups or their own Zoom calls.
- Combining participants from both Models 2 and 3 together for some workshop sessions proved to have a positive effect on Model 2 participants, as participants had an opportunity to learn from Model 3 participants, as well increasing their social networks. This combination also made coordinating and organizing workshop sessions easier for staff. As explained by staff, *"This approach [...] allowed for greater networking and integration opportunities for the Model 2 participants. This joint facilitation also allows for the Employment Counsellor team to work collaboratively in delivering sessions which creates an opportunity for facilitators to rotate time for workshop and 1:1 coaching with clients from past cohorts."*
- The program met participants' needs in terms of preparing them to enter the Canadian labour market. Participants were able to develop effective resumes and cover letters, as well as practice and improve interview and networking skills. As explained by a Model 3 staff member on the practicality of the program: *"And that's the feedback we get often from participants is this is very practical, it's meaningful, I can implement it, I can use it. We give them something in hand to use. So it's not just ideas and theories, it's practices of application."*

- The workshops focusing on self-leadership, particularly the session on emotional wellness, helped participants understand how to take care of themselves, especially during the pandemic, when there are fewer opportunities to interact with people, along with the added stressors of settling in a new country. These workshops also helped women learn about managing finance, stress, and negative self-talk. The focus on the whole person, and not only on employment, was highlighted as key by a Model 2 staff member: *“I think it’s important to take into consideration what they are going through on individual asset. A professional can’t be a good professional if they’re not feeling well. And with this pandemic, we all have realized how much mental health is important because if we don’t care about ourselves, we won’t be able to be caring about the services that we’re going to provide.”*
- By connecting participants to Champions, participants received additional support in their employment search. Champions provided suggestions on employment opportunities and feedback on their job applications, which was particularly helpful during the pandemic. As explained by staff, *“So I feel a mentorship program or Circle of Champion program is so important for anybody who is a newcomer to Canada. First thing is that that builds their confidence. Second thing is there is ample of information that is there in the community as well. So the mentors bring that information that they give you that information that you cannot gain from somewhere else. So it’s basically a living journey you have with your mentor.”* Staff also noted that it helped to build awareness for Champions, in which they learned that these participants may have education or work experience from outside of Canada, they were highly qualified and talented individuals who could be a great asset in their own organizations or in their networks’ organizations.
- Having various forms of employer engagement was highlighted as a key success of the program. Having frequent targeted recruitment events helped participants meet with a variety of different employers, as well as increased employers’ chances of finding the right candidate. Staff also coordinated informational interviews amongst participants and employers, which helped participants learn about the company/organization of interest, and skillsets required for the jobs. Model 2 staff further elaborated on the advantages of having focused employer engagement: *“The information that these employers share allows clients to be more informed in progressing with their job search and seems to be engaging for clients. The benefits of the sector specific sessions suggest continued focus on this type of networking support while engaging with employers will be advantageous for clients and employers alike.”*
- Bringing women together as cohorts as part of the program delivery allowed participants to connect with one another and to feel less isolated because it provides a safe space in which they can build friendships and relationships. Staff also mentioned that participants share employment opportunities with one another. The importance of women-only cohorts was explained by a Model 2 staff: *“And you see self-confidence are words that comes up very often*

and also the feeling that they are no longer alone. I am really shocked at the number of women who come into this training program feeling alone and through the training, they realize they have support. There are other women like them they can share and the training is not just training. It's creating a shared space for people to feel belonged. And then you see them begin to do things like setting up a WhatsApp group, connecting with each other. So they came in with no connections, but they are leaving with a whole lot of connections and friendships and friends. So when we think about integration, I like to think about these because we should never look at clients just for jobs. We need to look at how they rightfully fit in this Canadian society and feel belonged in the society."

Model 2 staff highlighted the following elements as working particularly well:

- Developing the essential skills portfolio has increased participants confidence in themselves. Using essential skills helped participants realize that they have skills that can be applied into a new occupation or sector. As explained by a staff member, *"I think it starts to give them that confidence to say your skills are very transferable, they can recognize how things that they've done previously then corresponds to what employers will be looking for in the local job market."*

On the essential skills portfolio: *"And I think it's been a very useful activity just in the sense of helping people to understand how to market their skill sets for particular jobs that they're interested in applying to, but also reminding them that they have a lot of [skills], ..., but one of the issues that I've noticed is just that confidence building. So using the portfolio as a way to... I think it encourages them to see life and accomplish all of these things in my career. Putting it all together in one sort of document I think has been helpful with the confidence building and when the presentations happen, there's a lot of encouragement and support from the group. And I think that's also just kind of goes further in terms of enhancing their confidence level. So I think it's been a very successful part of the program, but I do feel that not all participants take advantage of the opportunity to put together a portfolio and that I see as a bit of a disadvantage for them."* (program staff)

MODEL 3 — PARTNERING IN WORKFORCE INNOVATION

In addition to World Skills (see section above), la Société économique de l'Ontario (SÉO) is the other service partner that is implementing an intervention based on Model 3. This model is characterized by recruitment specialists who work directly with employers to match them with qualified candidates.

SÉO — Carrielles

Description of the intervention

Carrielles is la Société économique de l'Ontario program based on Model 3. It aims to support French-speaking visible minority newcomer women in finding francophone and bilingual employment in three regions of Ontario: Ottawa, Toronto, and Sudbury. As part of the program, participants are offered individualized support in their job search process. They are also matched with relevant job offers. SÉO also offers some group workshops on topics related to employment.

SÉO added a regionalization component to Carrielles. Most newcomers in Ontario arrive in the large centres in Ottawa and Toronto. While those regions offer opportunities, there are also untapped markets for employment outside of those centres. As part of the program, staff present these opportunities to participants and let them decide whether moving out of large centres would be suitable for them.

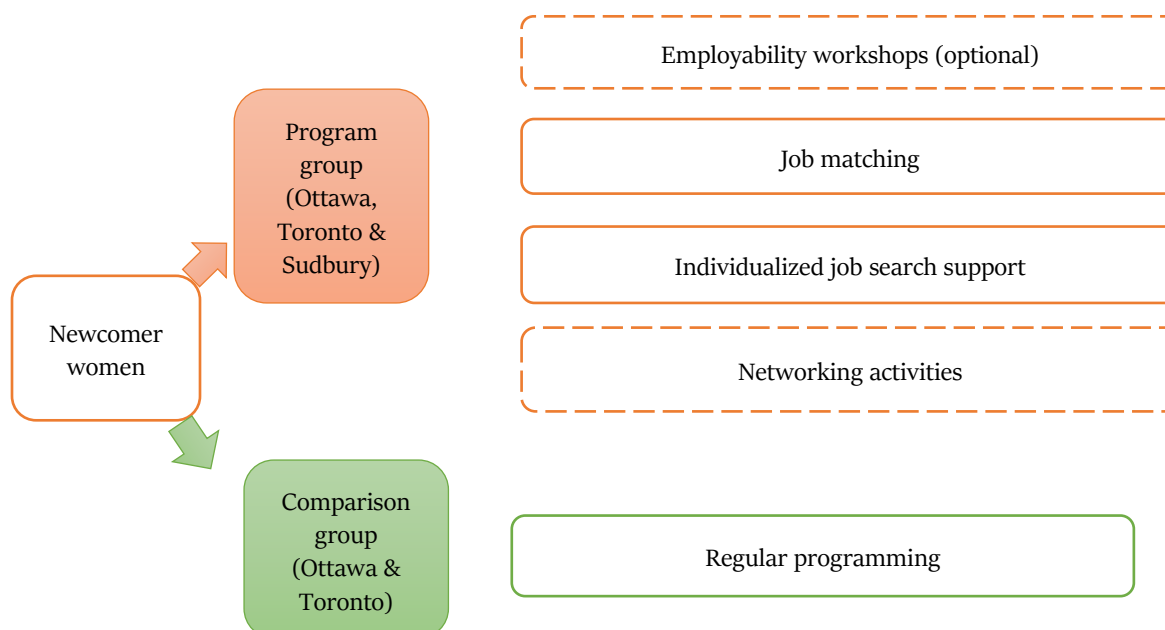
Figure 24 depicts the flow of participants in the program. Each program component is explored in detail below.

Table 24 **Summary of SÉO's Carrielles program**

Carrielles by SÉO	
Model	3
Region served	Ottawa, Toronto, and Sudbury
Key program components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized job search support Job matching Employability workshops as needed for participants
Length of formal program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No defined length
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming French-speaking
Target number of participants	70 in Ottawa 120 in Toronto 30 in Sudbury 100–150 comparison group (Ottawa and Toronto only)

Carrielles by SÉO	
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	53
Agreement period	August 2019 to September 2021
Research design	Experimental design in Ottawa and Toronto Case study design in Sudbury

Figure 24 Carrielles process diagram



- **Skills assessment and individualized support** – Individualized support is one of the main components of this program. A first step in the process is to conduct a skills assessment to understand the participant’s skills, experience, expertise as well as her employment goals. SÉO staff uses tools found on the Government of Canada website as well as a personality dimensions test. If skill gaps are identified, the participant is referred to training.

During the one-on-one sessions, staff touch on different topics such as resume writing, how to enter the Canadian workplace, and networking. Staff also work with clients to identify

opportunities for which the client would be a good match, even when it's not clear to participants if they have all of the qualifications – as explained by a staff member: *“When we have job offers, women say that they don’t think they have the qualifications, but we see that they do. It’s the confidence that is lacking. We explain to them why it [job offer] is for them. We also meet them before the interviews to build confidence (freely translated).”*

Once participants are employed, staff stay in touch with them until the end of their probation period and offer them supports needed to remain in the job. If a participant loses their job, staff will work with them to find a new one. While SÉO does not follow up with the employer, employers who have a relationship with SÉO often times provide feedback about the participant.

- **Job matching** – The other key component of the Carrielles program is job matching, which staff describe as *“matching offers with candidates”* (free translation). SÉO works with their partners, including other SÉO programs and the Conseil de la coopération de l’Ontario (CCO), to identify potential employers and to build relationships with them. As a result, employers send employment opportunities directly to SÉO and SÉO, in turn, matches candidates with potential jobs. Staff sometimes follow up with employers if they have questions about the position or job requirements.

SÉO also hosts meet and greets where participants can speak to employers.

- **Group training** – SÉO has held a few online group workshops on employment topics such as employability and self-confidence. Participants can also take part in workshops offered as part of their regular employability programming on employment in Ontario, entrepreneurship opportunities, and opportunities available outside of the major cities.

Modifications

- When the pandemic hit, SÉO shifted all of its programming from in-person to virtual delivery. Staff reported that the transition went smoothly.
- Due to the pandemic, the role of the Mouvement Ontarien des Femmes Immigrantes (MOFIF), one of SÉO’s project partners, shifted from one of providing workshops on diverse topics of interest to newcomer women to one of virtual recruitment.

In addition to the changes related to the pandemic, the role of the CCO has changed. Initially, the CCO had signed on to support data collection, but as the project unfolded, it was decided that a better role was for the CCO to help with identifying francophone and bilingual employers in the three targeted regions.

Challenges

One of the main challenges that SÉO has faced is recruitment. Initially, the challenge was an operational one within SÉO. All potential clients were referred to the regular stream of services at SÉO, and only after an initial meeting with SÉO staff were participants referred to the Carrielles program. Staff turnover slowed down the recruitment as well, and there were delays with the MOFIF partnership in establishing bootcamps that were intended to serve as a main source of recruitment for the program. In March 2020, when the pandemic hit, there was a slowdown in recruitment while staff and clients adjusted to the evolving situation. SÉO also realized that the initial breakdown of participants between the regions needed to be adjusted to better reflect the situation on the ground. While recruitment has picked up since then, the number of participants recruited to date is much lower than the initial targets.

The other challenge that was raised by staff at the start of the project (pre-pandemic) was finding childcare for participants that fit within IRCC's guidelines. The issue has been less prevalent since the shift to virtual programming.

What worked well

Staff have highlighted the following aspects of the program as having worked well:

- Shifting to virtual delivery has increased contact between staff and clients because it has made it easier for staff and participants to find time to connect since it does not require travelling to SÉO's offices. Hosting virtual workshops has supported SÉO's regionalization objective in that it has simplified access to information about employment opportunities outside of the major cities.
- Including a focus on confidence building in staff's approach has worked well with visible minority newcomer women. As explained by a staff member, one of the main differences between Carrielles and the regular services as part of the employability program offered by SÉO, other than the target population, is the focus on confidence building.
- The holistic approach to providing support that focuses on the whole person has allowed participants to feel listened to and safe in disclosing some of the challenging situations that they are facing. As explained by a staff member, *"We are going beyond the simple provision of employability services. We also bring mental and emotional comfort to our candidates, who confide in us about the difficulties they are encountering due to the social and economic crisis surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic"* (free translation)

MODEL 4 — BUILDING CANADIAN WORK EXPERIENCE

The YWCA Metro Vancouver is the only service partner that is testing an intervention based on Model 4. This model is designed to create paid short-term employment to assist unemployed newcomer refugee women gain meaningful work experience with organizations.

YWCA Metro Vancouver — Aspire

Description of intervention

YWCA Metro Vancouver is piloting two models — Elevate Skills (Model 2) and Aspire (Model 4). This section explores how YWCA Metro Vancouver implemented Model 4.

Elevate Skills is a 22-week program that provides refugee women in Metro Vancouver with six weeks of employment workshops, up to 12 weeks of a paid work placement, and three or four weeks of post-placement support. Participants should also be in receipt of resettlement assistance, income assistance, or be a privately sponsored refugee. This model offers a 75 per cent wage subsidy to employers participating in the work placement.

As of September 30, 2020, 47 participants attended at least one workshop session across four cohorts. Due to the pandemic and the second cohort's placement period being put on pause, cohort 1 is the only cohort to have completed all program components. Among the 12 participants of the first cohort, nine found work placements and three participated in post-placement support.

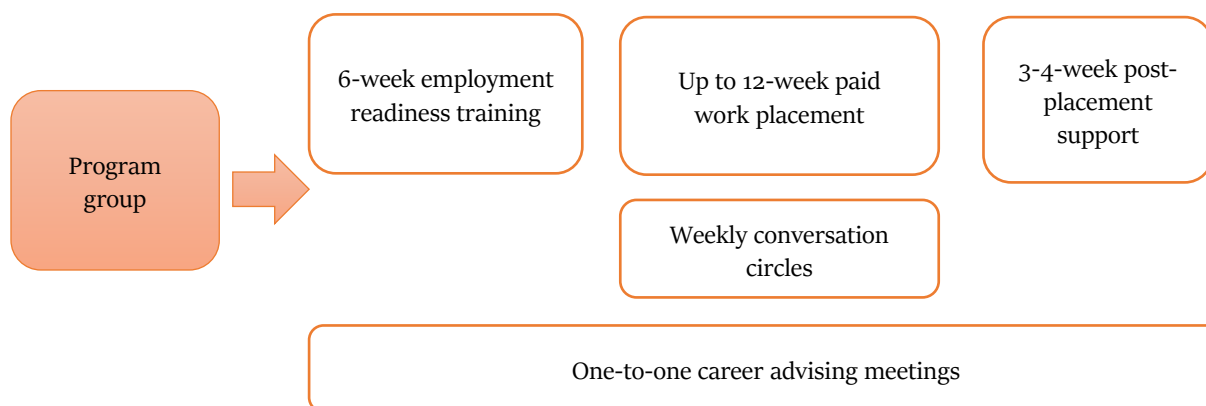
The research design adopted for this intervention is a proof-of-concept design which aims to test the model to determine whether it is feasible. All potential participants are invited to participate in the program (i.e., no comparison group).

Table 25 **Summary of YWCA's Aspire program**

Aspire by YWCA Metro Vancouver	
Model	Model 4
Region served	Metro Vancouver region
Key program components	<p>A program to support refugee women in building Canadian work experience, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-week employment readiness training ▪ One-to-one meetings with career advisor as needed ▪ Up to 12 weeks of paid work placement ▪ Weekly conversation circles during placement period ▪ 3 or 4 weeks of post-placement support
Length of formal program	Up to 22 weeks (incl. work placement)
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visible minority newcomer women eligible for IRCC programming ▪ Refugee ▪ Currently on Resettlement Assistance OR receiving Income Assistance OR a privately sponsored refugee ▪ Unemployed and not a full-time student
Target number of participants	72
Number of program participants served as of September 30, 2020	46
Agreement period	July 2019 to July 2021
Research design	Proof of concept

Figure 25 depicts the flow of a participant through the program. Each of the program components is explored in details below.

Figure 25 Aspire program process diagram



- Six weeks of employment readiness training** – Participants attend workshops three days a week for six weeks, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30p.m. (since the start of the pandemic, start time has been moved to 10 a.m.). On the other two days, participants complete assignments and meet with the Placement Specialist to work on placement applications. The workshops cover the following themes: identifying strengths and goals, preparing for work placements and work search strategies, and ensuring successful work placements. Under these themes, participants learn to identify their strengths and goals, apply job search techniques, and develop soft skills for the workplace. The training includes the Building Sustainable Livelihoods approach and the Hope Action Model to build confidence in participants and support them in recognizing their assets and strengths.
- Up to 12 weeks of paid work placement** – Participants are supported to apply for and obtain work placements continue to receive support and check-ins with staff throughout the placement period. Employers are provided a 75 per cent wage subsidy if desired and staff check in with employers as well to ensure that participants are well supported. The initial design was focused on placements with non-profit organizations.
- Workplace conversation circles** – During the work placement period, participants can join a weekly discussion group to discuss any challenges and learnings from their work placements or their continued job search for those who have not yet started their work placement. This activity aims to build a peer support network among the participants.
- Three to four weeks of post-placement support** – Following the work placement period, participants receive three or four weeks of post-placement support. For the second cohort on, the duration changed from four weeks to three so that the program could introduce a one-week break between the training period and the work placement period without

changing the total duration of the program. Staff felt that the one-week break would allow participants extra time to interview for and finalize their work placements so that more participants could take advantage of the entire 12 weeks of the wage subsidy. During this phase, participants receive individualized coaching, update their employment action plans and resumes, and identify any services or supports they may need.

Two innovative design features of this model include:

- **Designed to reach a harder-to-employ group** — The model is designed to provide Canadian work experience to newcomer women who are further away from the labour market. The wage subsidy allows for the creation of appropriate positions that may otherwise not exist.
- **Replaces or supplements income support programs** — The program supports participants in transitioning from income support to active employment.

Modifications to the program

The Aspire program has gone through a few changes as follows:

- Early in the employer engagement phase, program staff noticed that the 75 per cent wage subsidy was not sufficient for many non-profit employers to be able to create a work placement for the participants. Staff quickly pivoted to targeting private-sector employers as well.
- As mentioned above, an additional week was added between the end of the workshop period and the beginning of the work placement period to allow participants and staff additional time to finalize the work placements, and one week was removed from the post-placement period to compensate.
- When the provincial government declared a state of emergency in BC in March 2020, the second cohort was in the middle of their work placement period. As most participants were not working at the time, the work placement period for this cohort was paused so that participants would not feel pressured to keep working or looking for work even if they did not feel it was safe to do so. The start of the third cohort was also postponed from April to May 19, 2020. This was the first online cohort and all subsequent cohorts have also been delivered online via Zoom. The placement phase for the second cohort restarted on July 6, in line with cohort 3's placement phase.

Challenges

Staff have noted the following challenges in the delivery of this program:

- Although staff have been meeting target recruitment numbers, they experienced challenges recruiting participants receiving government assistance who are also motivated to attend the program and participate in the work placement. Staff suggested recruitment would be easier if they were able to establish a more formal referral partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction who is responsible for administering provincial income assistance benefits.
- Working with vulnerable clients was identified as a challenge. Because the target group includes participants who are further away from the labour market, they may have other urgent needs that arise during the program. Staff described participants experiencing housing crises, needing food support, or having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which staff are not trained or funded to address these issues. Staff mentioned that *“we know that’s it’s above what we’re supposed to do in the program. But she’s a human being and we’re human beings. And you can’t really ignore that. You can’t start looking for a job until these people have all of their basic needs.... So it’s difficult to treat just the job because there are so many factors that contribute to their lives right now and things that they need a lot of support with.”*
- Although the labour market situation has improved since the beginning of the pandemic, staff experienced pandemic-related challenges on the employer engagement side and on the participant side. Staff explained that *“before COVID happened, it was a lot easier to get in contact with employers, and employers were a lot more open to the idea of hiring. There were probably about a month and a half of a time period, right when COVID hit, when I wasn’t able to do employer engagement at all.”* Now that the labour market has re-opened, many employers are still working on rehiring former employees that had been laid off rather than creating new positions. Participants, on the other hand, were worried about the health risks of working outside the home during the pandemic, and many participants who had been in the process of finalizing work placements had interviews cancelled or were laid off. Speaking about participants, staff added that *“these women, first of all, [are] already really traumatized by their experiences, they’re all refugees, they’re fleeing from something... And then it just kind of affected them very strongly because it’s almost like a re-traumatizing experience where they have to hide and they have to be inside and not connect with anyone again. And so COVID has made a huge impact on this project.”* Staff also described higher unemployment creating more competition for jobs overall, and other government wage subsidies in response to the pandemic diminishing the effectiveness of the wage subsidy in this program.

- During the pandemic, women with children at home and no childcare options could not leave the home to participate in work placements. Staff also pointed out that the guidelines for eligible childcare spending limited their ability to support women to meet their childcare needs. Staff stated that *“the budget is there, but still, there are so many obstacles that prevent us from utilizing the budget to really help the women with childcare issues.”*
- Staff have mentioned that the work placement period could be longer or more flexible. Not all participants are able to find work placements in time to be able to use all 12 weeks of the wage subsidy.

What’s working well

Staff have been satisfied with the program implementation to date and with the preliminary effects on women. Specifically, they mentioned:

- The virtual cohorts have managed to create the same sense of belonging and connection as the in-person training. Staff stated that participants *“have adapted themselves really well to this online platform. So I still do see a lot of friendship being built up, even though we’re doing this online.”* Participants also have the opportunity to connect socially during break time as facilitators will leave the zoom meeting open for them to chat.
- Despite some of the pandemic-related challenges in employer engagement, staff highlighted the wage subsidy as a key program component. Staff said that *“because of the wage subsidy, employers are more open to try our participants and give them a chance to prove themselves at work.”*

On building confidence and trust: *“I think when they’re coming from places where they didn’t have any support and then they get here and a lot of them don’t have family here or don’t have friends or any real community. To have the program and to have people in the program who genuinely show that they care about them and that can develop that sense of trust is really important. And you watch them, their confidence levels are so high by the end of the program compared to the beginning. It’s amazing. You can really see the difference. And I’m very proud of that. I get really happy towards the end of the program when you just sit there, it’s like they’re different women. They just feel better in their own shoes. And they have an idea of the fact that they can do this and they’re confident about it.”* (program staff)

CONCLUSION

This section provides a partial answer to the four implementation evaluation questions. These should be considered preliminary as they are based on the data to date. They will be revisited in the final report once final data collection and analysis have been completed.

In general, was the overall project implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

Overall, the pilot project has been implemented successfully to date. Indeed, SRDC worked with eight service providers to implement 11 interventions based on the four models designed as part of Phase 1 of this project. In its first year, 836 visible minority newcomer women participated in the pilot programs across Canada. The service providers delivered their programs successfully to visible minority newcomer women and did well engaging with participants, as evidenced by surveys and feedback from participants.

The 11 interventions recruited participants who identified as visible minority newcomer women and who had encountered challenges in finding employment in Canada. The participants were diverse, coming from 95 different countries. The program was delivered to women whose levels of skill ranged from low to high. Some participants had previously held employment in Canada before the start of the program, while others had no work experience in Canada. Participants in the project are highly educated with over 90 per cent having a university degree obtained outside of Canada. Participants in all models expressed high hopes for the future.

In addition, SRDC developed and implemented the planned research activities in collaboration with the service providers. A community of practice was put in place early in the project to bring together all 11 service providers to share about program successes and challenges and to learn from one another. Service providers were especially appreciative of this project feature at the start of the pandemic since it provided a venue for discussing the shift to online programming.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required major adaptations to the project, especially in terms of program delivery with a shift to online programming. This shift has required flexibility and adaptability from program staff to take a program that was designed for in-person delivery and convert it to an online format. The shift has eliminated barriers to participation for some participants (childcare and transportation), but has presented additional barriers (i.e., IT access and competing priorities) for others.

While the early findings suggest the project was successfully implemented and identify implementation lessons, we need to wait until the final report to see if it achieves the employment and other related outcomes and for whom.

In general, were the service delivery models implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

Overall, the service delivery models were implemented as planned, even if the demand-led features could have been implemented more strongly. For some of the service providers, this is still an area of capacity development. Settlement agencies tend to focus more on the client and rely very much on existing employer relationships and building new ones. We will explore the employer engagement aspect more in the final report (employer surveys/interviews).

Model 1 interventions were implemented successfully, although in practice, they were less demand-led than initially anticipated, in part due to the pandemic. Employers were not as involved in the planning, design, and delivery of the programs, in part due to COVID-19. There were also some challenges with finding work placements for participants. The milestones approach supported the staff and participants in understanding participants' needs, goals and progress.

Model 2 interventions as implemented were closely aligned with how the model was designed. For most of the service providers, the essential skills framework was a new area of focus. At the beginning of the project, staff found it challenging to incorporate essential skills in the employment-readiness training. Over time, staff saw the value of essential skills as it helped participants identify the skills they already possessed, how to transfer those skills to other jobs, and focus on what skills needed to be improved, which all contributed to increasing participants' confidence in themselves.

Model 3 interventions were less-demand driven than initially designed. The program intended to match job opportunities with participants. However, in practice, in many cases, a job match was defined as informing participants of job openings and supporting them in applying for the position. Both service providers saw participants as their clients as opposed to employers, as designed.

Model 4 was implemented successfully, but there were several challenges with the work placement component, which was not intended to be a work experience commensurate with experience as it was targeted to refugee women who experience multi-barriers to employment. The Canadian work experience was meant as a step forward in integrating into the labour market. However, participants were not satisfied with any work placement; they wanted it to be aligned with their experience and expertise, and, so the program sought to find commensurate work placements. Moreover, initially the YWCA had intended to work with non-profit organizations, but this proved difficult as many organizations indicated that they were not able to cover the other 25 per cent of the wage. Participants recruited for this program might not have been those who needed that first Canadian work experience and who needed the safe environment provided by not-for-profit organizations.

Most of the service providers put a lot of emphasis on the employment-readiness training, including on empowering women, as this component might be more familiar to them. However, connecting participants with employers is a crucial step in supporting participants in integrating into the Canadian labour market. Participants also echoed that they saw value and wanted more of those opportunities.

Across models, several components worked particularly well. Customized support was valued as it allowed women's strengths and challenges to be part of the discussion. It also provided an opportunity for non-occupational-specific programs to focus on participants' occupation of interest. The cohort approach and peer support created brought together women who are facing similar situations were cited to be an important part of the services by both practitioners and participants.

In general, were the research designs and activities implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?

To date, the research designs and activities have been implemented as planned in general. All pilot sites followed the selected research designs: as expected, six interventions implemented a randomized controlled trial design, one quasi-experimental design, and the other four were proofs of concept. There were initial challenges, especially with the experimental and quasi-experimental designs, as this was a first for many of the program staff involved. For the few months of implementation, there was a learning period for staff in which they learned how to introduce the random assignment to potential participants and to manage their expectations. Staff became more comfortable with the research components over time.

Recruitment challenges, due in part to COVID-19, affected the research as well. A few of the sites implementing a randomized controlled trial asked that the random assignment ratio be changed to increase the number of participants who were assigned to the program group to allow for a successful program delivery.

All 11 pilot sites have contributed to the data collection to support a data-driven innovation project. Specifically, all service providers are administering informed consent, collecting administrative data on program delivery and participation, entering data into iCARE, and being responsible for the administration of the participant surveys. Response rates for the participant surveys show that service providers, for the most part, are encouraging participants to complete the surveys. Indeed, staff are highlighting the importance of data in this research project in their emails and phone calls to participants. Several service providers have mentioned that having a dedicated data person has helped to mitigate the data collection burden. SRDC has also worked with service providers when issues arise to provide them with potential solutions.

Did the programs meet the needs of the intended range of newcomer women so that they were able to complete the program?

Early evidence shows that the programs are meeting the needs of the visible minority newcomer women who are participating in the interventions. The programs supported highly educated women, but despite their credentials (most of which were obtained in their home country) and established professional experience, the majority had challenges in securing good employment in Canada largely due to knowledge and network. Programs sought to support women by providing employment-readiness training, connections with employers (in most programs), and individualized support.

Participants were satisfied with the programs received and a majority reported that the main program components were useful. They benefitted from learning about the Canadian workplace culture and environment, as the work environment in participants' home countries was vastly different. Participants felt more prepared to navigate the Canadian labour market after the completion of the program.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE EVALUATION

Over the next twelve months, SRDC will continue additional data collection and analysis to broaden its knowledge of the implementation of the CPVMNW pilot projects, investigate the value of targeted employment services for visible minority newcomer women and for employers, and conduct a cost study. Specifically, we will continue to work with service providers to collect participant information through surveys, interviews and focus groups, and administrative data, implementation data from service providers through monthly reports, regular check-ins, and staff interviews as well as employer data from interviews/surveys. The project's final evaluation report will be submitted to IRCC in March 2022. It will focus on outcomes for participants, employers, and service providers and will include a cost analysis.

Over the next nine months, SRDC will also support service providers and oversee the implementation of the 11 interventions which will wrap up between September and November 2021.

SRDC plans to hold a webinar as part of the community of practice in the Spring 2021 to share findings from this report with pilot project staff, and to get their perspective on the interpretation of data and implications of findings.

APPENDIX A: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation is conducted at three interrelated levels: the intervention level, the model level, and the overall project level. The overall project evaluation questions are described in this section. For each intervention or model, a subset of these questions form the evaluation questions for that particular intervention or model. For example, certain questions related to skills training are not relevant for all interventions and all models. Therefore, those questions are excluded from the set of evaluation questions for those particular interventions and models.

The goal of the overall project evaluation is to establish the challenges, benefits, and lessons learned from the implementation of the intervention to help VMNW integrate into the labour market. It will draw on the commonalities between experiences across different interventions and models, as well as investigate the potential causes of different results across models.

1. Implementation Evaluation Questions

- a. In general, was the overall project implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
- b. In general, were the service delivery models implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
- c. In general, were the research designs and activities implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?
- d. Did the programs meet the needs of the intended range of newcomer women so that they were able to complete the program?

2. Outcome and Impact⁴⁴ Evaluation Questions

- a. Participants
 - i. Immediate Outcomes and Impacts

Does the pilot project improve career adaptability, skills relevant to the Canadian workplace, social networks, and/or lead to job placement (relative to a comparison group where possible)?

⁴⁴ When the causal impact of the project can be identified (for example, using a randomized controlled trial), we refer to the evaluation as an impact evaluation. When this is not feasible, an outcome evaluation will be conducted which compares the outcomes of participants before and after the intervention.

ii. Intermediate Outcomes and Impacts

Does the pilot project improve employment, training, well-being, acculturation, and/or financial well-being (relative to a comparison group where possible)?

iii. Differential Outcomes and Impacts⁴⁵

Do the extent of these immediate and intermediate outcomes and impacts differ by sub-group (for example, initial skill level, education level, work experience, sector, family structure, immigration history, etc.)?⁴⁶

b. Employer (for models involving employers)

i. Immediate Outcomes

Does the pilot project improve recruitment and hiring for employers?

ii. Intermediate Outcomes

Does the pilot project lower turnover, improve job performance, and increase workplace diversity and/or employer cultural competency?

c. Service providers

i. Immediate and Intermediate Site Outcomes

In the short and intermediate term, does the pilot project improve capacity of the service delivery partners? In what aspects? What are the challenges in capacity building?

d. Unintended Consequences

i. Immediate and Intermediate Site Outcomes

In the immediate and intermediate term, what were, if any, the unintended consequences of the pilot project for service delivery partners, participants, and employers?

⁴⁵ The differential analysis is guided by a Gender-based Analysis lens.

⁴⁶ The subgroup analysis is conditional on a sufficient sample size.

3. Cost–benefit Analysis⁴⁷

- a. Are there net gains or net losses from the perspective of newcomer visible minority women who participate in the project?
- b. How effective is the pilot project from the standpoint of the government budgets?
- c. What are the benefits and costs of the project to society as a whole?
- d. How do the models compare in terms of costs, benefits and/or effectiveness?

4. Global Analysis

- a. What are the common challenges encountered in implementing and delivering the pilot? How do the sites overcome these common challenges?
- b. What are the common lessons learned, emerging best practices, and recommendations for future improvements in programming?
- c. Is it possible to scale up the pilot project nationally? Are there any models specifically that can be scaled up nationally?
- d. Which groups of participants did the pilot work best for, how and why?
- e. What are the commonalities and the differences in the implementation, outcomes, impacts, and cost–benefit results from the different sites and models?
- f. In the intermediate term, have the service providers built a community of practice and improved their programming for visible minority newcomer women? In what aspects? What were the challenges in doing so?

⁴⁷ The type of cost–benefit analysis to be conducted will be determined based on feasibility and will be either a cost–benefit analysis, an analysis of the social return to investment, or a cost analysis.

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