

# COMMUNITY REPORT

## Immigration in 5 Rural Manitoba Communities with a Focus on Refugees:

### Dauphin Case Study

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## Introduction

In November 2015, a national resettlement initiative was undertaken to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees across Canada. Since November 4th, 2015 the Government of Canada has welcomed more than 29,700 Syrian refugees (August 1st, 2016) and the commitment to resettling more refugees to Canada is continuing in 2016<sup>1</sup>. More than 1000 Syrian refugees have resettled in Manitoba and, of those, 90 have settled outside of Winnipeg, in rural communities and small centres. This research project was initiated out of this experience and is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO).

The purpose of the project is to learn from the current experiences in five rural communities in Manitoba and examine the settlement and community capacity of these smaller centres to resettle refugees. Selected communities are those who have received newcomers and have recently received refugees or have an active plan in place for the arrival of refugees.

This research project builds on the 2015 “Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC’s Western region”<sup>2</sup> study conducted by the Rural Development institute (RDI) and Immigration Research West (IRW). It offered a snapshot of the immigration settlement services sector in 29 selected rural communities across the western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) and in the three territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut).

1 Government of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp>). date accessed August 8, 2016.

2 Ashton et al. (2015, May). Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC’s Western Region. Retrieved from <https://www.brandou.ca/rdi/publication/immigration-settlement-services-and-gaps-in-citizenship-and-immigration-canadas-western-region/>

## Research Method

This study follows the same method as the 2015 study. Five communities<sup>3</sup> were selected that are distributed geographically and represent a sample of the provinces’ smaller cities<sup>4</sup>. The five cases are: Dauphin, Portage la Prairie, Boissevain-Killarney, Steinbach-Kleefeld and Morden-Winkler-Altona-Carman.

In the five communities, data were collected through 30 telephone interviews with a senior official of the Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) or a representative of the Refugee Sponsorship Group. The sample of participating service providers included both SPOs that have a primary mandate to serve newcomers (funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada or other sources) and community organizations supporting newcomers in some capacity. This research did not include newcomers or refugees and as such the findings are based solely on the opinions and perceptions of SPOs and refugee sponsorship groups’ representatives.

Once data were collected, a draft report was compiled for each community. Each was shared with the research participants and other local stakeholders. Their feedback was incorporated and reports finalized.

3 Similarly as in the Ashton et al.(2015) study, the term “community” is conceptualized in geographic terms as either a “local community” that consists of a single municipality, or a “regional community,” comprising two or more neighboring municipalities and/or areas that are not incorporated as municipalities.

4 Winnipeg is excluded from the study together with the communities participated in the Ashton et al. (2015) study with an exception of Dauphin, due to its recent experience with refugee resettlement (15 individuals as of August 8, 2016).

# Dauphin Case Study

The Dauphin case is a snapshot of perceptions from five participants. Organization representatives reported receiving funding for their operations from IRCC, private, provincial and municipal sources. Three participants and one additional stakeholder provided feedback to finalize the report.

## Community Context

Dauphin is located in the Parkland region of Manitoba, on the edge of Riding Mountain National Park with Duck Mountain Provincial Park across the valley. It is a rural community with a population of 8,251 residents (2011)<sup>5</sup>, and an industry focused primarily on agriculture.

According to IRCC, 15 refugees have arrived in the Dauphin area since November 4, 2015 under the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program.<sup>6</sup> The five participants confirmed both the settlement of newcomers in their community over the past five years and the recent arrival of the 15 refugees, all reportedly from Syria. Participants disagreed on whether or not more refugees are anticipated to arrive in their community before the end of 2016.



5 Statistics Canada, 2011 Census

6 <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/map.asp>

One participant reported there was an active plan in place for 4-5 individuals under the Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) program, while a second participant said there was not an active plan and the remainder did not know. From the IRCC website, there are no families in pending status intended for resettlement in Dauphin. In the feedback received, two individuals noted that there are local discussions about this but no active plan is currently in place.

## Settlement in the Community

Participants were mixed in their perceptions of how easy settlement was for newcomers in Dauphin. Three participants felt that settlement was either difficult or somewhat difficult for newcomers, while the remaining two participants felt that settlement was somewhat easy. The key challenges to settlement were identified as language difficulties (both newcomers' English language skills and the dearth of Arabic and other foreign language speakers and translators in the community), limited religious and ethno-cultural diversity, and the lack of public transportation or the expensive alternative of taxis. In the feedback received one individual highlighted that there is religious and ethno-cultural diversity in the community and positively spoke about examples such as: the existence of the Parkland Filipino Association, the Spanish Language Church, a growing Indian and Pakistani community, a few Muslim families and many families from China.

As an additional challenge, participants mentioned the limited resources and funding to support the settlement of newcomers and refugees in Dauphin. Although there is a very experienced, local IRCC-funded SPO (Parkland Regional Settlement Services) and settlement services are easy to navigate and access, there is only one person employed there. Therefore many responsibilities are placed on a broad community-based volunteer network (however less experienced) to support the settlement of newcomers and refugees in Dauphin. This strong and committed volunteer network, the experienced SPO (regardless of the limited resources), the availability of entry level employment positions in the area and relative accessibility of housing were mentioned as reasons that make settlement easier for newcomers and refugees in Dauphin.

Table 1 – Settlement services offered in Dauphin as reported by the five participants.

		
<h3>Information and Orientation</h3>	<h3>Literacy and Language Training</h3>	<h3>Support Services</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and orientation</li> <li>• Needs assessment and referral</li> <li>• Initial reception</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language training (Basic)</li> <li>• Language assessment (referrals to Brandon)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation (mainly by volunteers; some but limited funded by IRCC)</li> <li>• Childcare (limited for attending classes)</li> <li>• Interpretation/translation (very limited)</li> <li>• Crisis counseling</li> <li>• Women, senior programming (informal, ad-hoc basis)</li> <li>• Youth focused programming</li> <li>• Refugee specific services (limited, mainly by volunteers)</li> </ul>
		
<h3>Labour Market Access Supports</h3>	<h3>Community Connections</h3>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance finding a job (resume building, interview skills training)</li> <li>• Connections with employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction between newcomers and residents</li> <li>• Welcoming communities (multicultural events)</li> <li>• Mentoring opportunities (informal)</li> </ul>	

## Settlement Services

There is a variety of settlement services and supports offered to newcomers in Dauphin as shown in Table 1 (page 3). In many cases, services are limited or reliant on volunteers. In Table 1, within each service category, services are reported in the order of the frequency mentioned by the five participants, with the most commonly reported service listed first in each section and the least commonly reported services listed last. Three of the five participants indicated that refugee-specific services were offered in the community (EAL classes for Syrian refugees, Arabic-English interpretation). Most of those refugee-specific services and supports are offered by the sponsorship groups.

In the feedback received it was mentioned that language assessment is only taking place in Brandon. In one special case, representatives from Winnipeg visited the community to conduct language assessments for 13 individuals. In the feedback offered it was also questioned whether formal programming for immigrant women and seniors are offered in Dauphin.

Four out of five participants reported services need to expand to meet the needs of the current newcomer population, while one felt services are sufficient. Participants voice a clear need for more funding and staff to provide more services, especially English language classes, since currently there are only two individuals working a few hours a week each as EAL teachers. More resources for interpretation services are also needed since the community has recently received 15 refugees with little to no English language skills. Additionally, expanding access to childcare during EAL classes and other services would both improve English skills and reduce isolation for refugee mothers with young children.

In addition to expansion, participants from Dauphin were asked if services in their community needed to change to meet the needs of the current newcomer population and three out of five felt that the services currently offered were the services currently needed. One participant felt change would be needed in the future if Dauphin's newcomer and refugee population continues to grow to meet their unique needs. The fifth participant believed change is needed now to provide more information and knowledge to community members about refugees' experiences and cultures. In addition, though the volunteers in Dauphin are committed, it will be challenging to maintain the current level of investment, which strongly indicates the need for more funding, especially if the newcomer population continues to grow.

## Short and Long-term Needs of Refugees

Participants were asked to identify the top short and long-term needs of refugees. In the short-term, participants identified housing (mentioned by four out of five), English language training (3) and social connections/welcoming community (3) as the top needs. Long term most participants mentioned employment (5) and language skills (4) as the top needs. English language skills are considered essential both in the short and long term as these skills are cornerstone to both meaningful employment and being able to communicate with one's neighbours and to navigate the community.

## Community Capacity

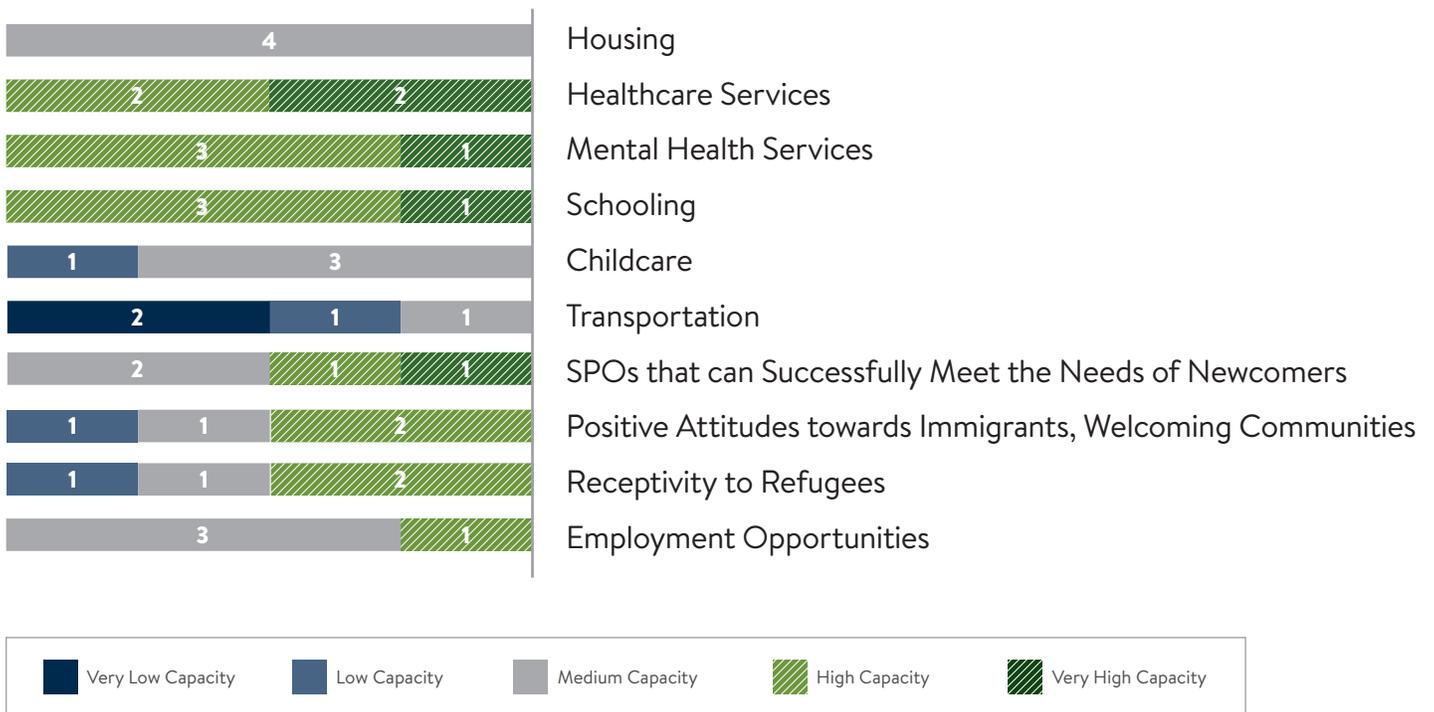
Four of the five participants felt that Dauphin had the capacity to attract and retain refugees and the fifth participant was unsure. The four participants ranked ten areas of community capacity for assessing the community's ability to respond to the needs of refugees (Figure 1, page 5).

The community's capacity to provide schooling, health, and mental health services were ranked as high to very high by the four respondents. Schools have been very accommodating to the needs of children from refugee families and have employed educational assistants to support these students. Health and mental health services are quite sufficient in the community and interpretation is offered when accessing them. However in the feedback received one individual mentioned that interpretation services for accessing health services are not readily available and are not offered by the health authorities. It was also mentioned that although mental health services exist, the counsellors don't have the necessary experience to address the mental health needs of refugees.

All four participants responding to this question also felt that Dauphin's IRCC-funded SPO was doing a great job, despite limited funding, and a fear of more funding cuts. More funding is needed to provide programs and hire more staff.

Regarding housing, childcare, and employment opportunities the community capacity was considered medium. There is some availability of low income housing but limited Manitoba Housing units exist. Finding childcare is challenging for everyone in the community and becomes greater for refugees and newcomers who lack community connections. However, some volunteers do assist refugee families with childcare. Dauphin Friendship Centre has also supported the provision of childcare services. Regarding employment, there are opportunities in the community; however, they become fewer for skilled professionals.

Figure 1 - Areas of community capacity ranked from very low to very high by the four research participants responding to this question



Participants were mixed in their report of community capacity regarding positive attitudes towards newcomers and receptivity to refugees, with rankings on these two items ranging from low capacity to high capacity. There have been some explicit examples of fear of and discrimination towards refugees, but the broader community has been relatively supportive. In addition, the Dauphin Interchurch Refugee Team has been working towards educating the community regarding diversity and the refugee experience through community events.

Transportation was the only area that participants reported a “very low” capacity for the community, with two participants ranking transportation very low, one low, and one medium capacity. This ranking is understandable given that Dauphin has no public transportation, taxis are expensive, and newcomers have to rely almost solely on volunteers for transportation assistance.

## Partnerships and Agency Capacity

All five participants reported that their organization, agency or group was actively engaged in partnership with other stakeholders in the community. The most commonly reported partnerships were with the IRCC-funded SPO (Parkland

Regional Settlement Services), community NGOs (i.e., Dauphin Friendship Centre), and other local service providers. Partnerships with health services and agencies, schools, sponsorship groups, community members, media outlets, churches and municipal offices were also reported.

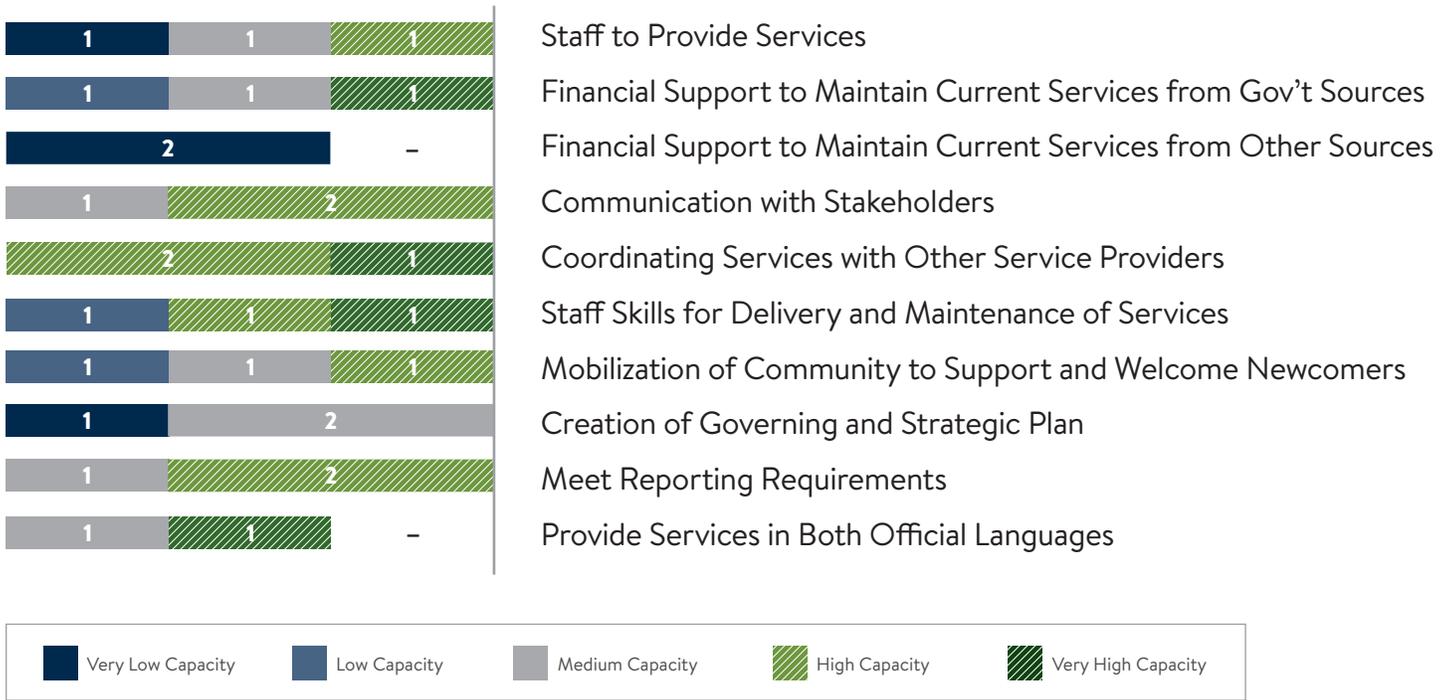
Participants shared their opinion regarding what types of local partnerships are needed in the community in order to better respond to the needs of refugees (regardless of whether the partnerships are already in place or not). Participants identified partnerships with the Seniors Centre to offer programming for senior refugees and the Parkland Job Opportunity Centre to increase cultural understanding of Syrian refugees within the employment context. Partnership with the Dauphin Municipal government was also identified as needed and this was also reiterated in the feedback received. Currently the Dauphin Municipal government does not financially support the refugee resettlement and service provision and needs to be engaged in the planning for the refugee resettlement in Dauphin. Other important partnerships mentioned are with employers, schools, and the sponsorship groups. It was also highlighted that the partnership between the community members/volunteers and sponsorship groups would need to be continually fostered to maintain the supports offered to refugees and other newcomers (e.g. transportation).

The participants were also asked about their own agency’s or organization’s capacity to meet the needs of newcomers, including refugees, in the community. Three participants ranked their organizational capacity on a set of activities (Figure 2). Fewer participants answered these questions, as they were mostly intended for SPOs and did not always apply well to sponsorship groups or other community stakeholders who were not formally funded for their support of newcomers.

The highest capacities were their ability to coordinate services with other service providers, their ability to communicate with stakeholders, and meet reporting requirements. Funding from sources other than the government was less positive with 2 people reporting that capacity was very low.

All other areas of capacity had mixed rankings by participants, with reports from low to high on each. Overall participants mentioned that more staff are needed for the SPOs together with more funding and flexibility in funding to increase staff temporarily as needed (e.g. during an influx of newcomers/refugees). One participant mentioned there is less capacity to deal with Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) since it involves additional efforts such as to recruit and coordinate volunteers, create and execute a plan for the GARs’ resettlement process; all of which need additional funding and staff.

Figure 2 - Areas of agency capacity as ranked by the three research participants responding to this question



The following two sections of the Dauphin community report explores the participants' experiences with the refugee resettlement that has occurred since November 2015.

## Recent Experiences with Refugees

The participants described an elaborate, coordinated effort of settling refugees including a network of service providers, committees, and community volunteers to support the arrival of 15 refugees from Syria. Examples are churches, the IRCC-funded SPO (Parkland Regional Settlement Services), the Dauphin Friendship Centre, Community Mental Health, the school division, local medical offices. The community prepared well in advance and the Dauphin Interchurch Refugee Team was created months before the refugees' arrival to organize and plan for their arrival. Many initiatives were taken by the sponsorship groups and the organizations involved: housing was secured, fund raising was conducted to raise funds for expenses, schools and doctors were contacted. The team reached out to Altona's Build a Village organization to gather information, in addition to communicating with Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, IRCC and other organizations from the settlement field outside of the community (e.g. Westman Immigrant services, Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, Winnipeg English Language Assessment and referral Centre). Long-term language training was planned and connections with interpreters from outside Dauphin were formed. Teams of volunteers were established to assist with transportation as well. The library brought in resources related to Arabic translation and other items that would be needed to facilitate communication. Overall, three out of four participants felt the sponsorship groups and SPOs worked well together during the resettlement process of refugees. The fourth participant strongly disagreed with this statement mentioning that better organization and a more proactive approach was needed by the sponsorship groups.

Dauphin participants listed the services and supports that the sponsorship groups offer to refugees in the community. Some of the services offered more in collaboration with the settlement office (Table I, page 3), but the sponsorship group also offers transportation, housing, financial support, childcare, registering children in schools, arranging medical appointments, connecting them with the community and employers and arranging interpretation services.

Four participants agree with the statement that there are no refugees in Dauphin who need support and they don't seek help or access support.

## Challenges & Successes

In Dauphin, the preparation and planning pre and post refugee arrival was impressive; however, challenges remained during the resettlement process.

Participants unanimously mentioned language and communication as the key challenge during the resettlement process. Dauphin is a small town and prior to the arrival of the Syrian refugees there were very few Arabic speakers in the community. The refugees arrived with limited to no English language skills. The settlement committees and community members knew in advance that English would be limited; they relied on Google Translate and hired an interpreter who could also facilitate life skills for refugees for the first two to three months. The language barrier challenge is ongoing and will continue until the refugees acquire sufficient language skills, which will take time.

Insufficient funding to cover the increase in service demand from the arrival of the 15 refugees put pressure on the local SPO. They had to "cut corners everywhere" to ensure proper programming for the refugees is in place and still this was not enough. The community volunteers are a significant support for refugee resettlement and there is a challenge to maintain the volunteers long-term. In hindsight, two participants said there could have been better preparation and training of volunteers and more awareness of workload that was required.

Participants also reported their perceptions of the key successes during the refugee resettlement. The decision to raise funds and hire an interpreter for the first few months was seen as an extremely valuable decision for both the refugees and community stakeholders. The success of the resettlement process was largely due to the efforts of the sponsorship groups and their committed teams of volunteers.

Many community members, with unique skills (i.e., teachers, medical staff) got involved and volunteered their time and skills to support diverse efforts. One participant noted that a refugee family said they felt their sponsorship group was like “one big family,” which certainly indicated they felt supported. The close partnership between sponsorship groups and the settlement office was integral to the success of refugees’ resettlement as well. Overall, and despite the challenges, refugee families have reportedly made significant progress in the few short months after arrival, with children doing well in school, fathers working part-time, and language skills progressing nicely.

## Conclusion

Dauphin is a small rural community that has recently welcomed three refugee families. Key groups and volunteers pulled together and created a task force to plan for and support the resettlement of refugees. Challenges were met including funding, communication due to language barriers and recruiting and maintaining volunteers. There is a clear call for more funding and more staff to support the needs of new residents. Currently a lot of the services offered depend heavily on volunteers (e.g. transportation, interpreters hired with funds raised by volunteers) and this is difficult to maintain in the long term. Language acquisition is key to both employment and community integration; therefore, language training should be high priority and sufficiently funded. More community education regarding ethno-cultural diversity and the refugee experience are needed in order to create and sustain a welcoming environment, open and supportive of refugee and newcomer arrival and integration.

The community has learned some lessons from the recent experience with refugee resettlement and has a more realistic understanding of what to expect in the future. The concerted and committed effort from all community stakeholders and the progress refugees have shown in such a short time, leave the participants feeling as though the resettlement process has been a success. With more funding and resources there is potential for Dauphin to attract and retain more refugees in the future.

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE RESEARCH TEAM

**William Ashton**, MCIP, PhD  
*Director*

**Eleni Galatsanou**, MSc  
*Project Lead*

**Rachael Pettigrew**, PhD  
*Research Associate*

**Meghan Miller Cronkrite**  
*Research Assistant*

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### Terms:

**Newcomers:** Includes all immigrants, permanent residents, refugees, refugee claimants, temporary foreign workers, and international students that have been in Canada for 1 day to 5 years.

**Refugees:** Includes all Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), Refugees under the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVORs) and refugee claimants. A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee (IRCC, 2016)

**Community:** A municipality, district, region or other geographic area consisting of population clusters.

**Stakeholder:** Any group, organization, or enterprise that has newcomers and/or refugees as the primary or secondary clientele.



#### Contact Us

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

270-18th Street, McMaster Hall, Lower Level

Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A9

Phone: 204-571-8515

Email: [rdi@brandonu.ca](mailto:rdi@brandonu.ca)

[www.BrandonU.ca/RDI](http://www.BrandonU.ca/RDI)