

# International lessons on newcomer attraction and retention in regional towns

Submission to the  
Joint Standing  
Committee on  
Migration based on  
findings from a  
Churchill Fellowship

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# Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

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I welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the inquiry into migration in regional Australia.

This submission draws on the key findings of my Churchill Fellowship research in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden from March to May 2019.

It is informed by my experience working for over ten years in support services and government policy related to refugee settlement in Australia.

***“Investigate strategies to support the secondary migration of refugees to regional and rural towns.”***

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## Terms of Reference

This submission addresses the following points in the Inquiry Terms of Reference:

- National and international best practice strategies to encourage people to settle and stay in regional areas;
- Strategies to develop regional humanitarian migration; and
- Local volunteers, employers and community organisations and their role in facilitating regional settlement.

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# Introduction

Regional and rural towns around the world face depopulation and decline. Migrants can help reverse this trend, but many towns aren't aware that they don't have to look abroad to find people. There are people from migrant and refugee backgrounds already living in the same country, in larger cities like Sydney, who might be interested to relocate and who can offer what the town is looking for. Secondary migration is when migrants choose to relocate from their initial destination to a new location. It can create strong futures for regional communities and newcomers, so long as the fit is right.

There are many towns around the world that have managed to stem population decline through newcomer attraction and retention. From March to May 2019, I visited some of these towns in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden to learn what has worked well and what some of their challenges have been. My research was part of a Churchill Fellowship, and builds upon my work in the New South Wales Government supporting refugee settlement in regional areas.

Regional Australia has critical skills shortages and positions that cannot be filled locally. It needs migrants to build the local workforce, support entrepreneurship and contribute to local communities. However, over the past five years only 15% of refugees in Australia have settled in regional areas. At the same time, moved by media images of the global humanitarian crisis, more and more Australians in regional areas have put their hand up to bring refugees to their town. Recent policy decisions in Australia and overseas have emphasised visa incentives which force migrants to remain in regional towns for fixed periods of time only to see them move away when the time is up. Regional communities need to focus on how they can make themselves attractive to migrants and refugees so that people come and then choose to stay. At the heart of this is building a welcoming community where people feel valued and like they belong.

My research confirmed the win-win role that secondary migration can play for regional towns and newcomers. It showed that any regional attraction strategy needs to start with recognition and acceptance of the need for change and engage all levels of government, community leaders, business and civil society to make it work. It is important that newcomers are valued as individuals who can contribute the skills, workforce and qualities that are needed to sustain and grow communities. This is particularly true for refugees, who are often viewed through a deficit lens as people in need of help and protection.

Newcomer attraction and retention is a complex, iterative and challenging process which requires long-term collective and coordinated effort. But the benefits for regional towns in capitalising on the economic and social contributions of newcomers are well worth it.

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# Research scope

My research sought to investigate strategies to support the secondary migration of refugees to regional and rural towns. From March to May 2019, I conducted over 60 interviews and meetings in-person with organisations and stakeholders in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden representing:

- Federal governments – 3
- Provincial / County level government – 6
- Local / Municipal level government – 8
- Educational institutions and think-tanks – 13
- Business and employment services – 12
- Migrant and refugee serving organisations – 13
- Volunteer groups – 7
- Refugee and migrant newcomers - 20

I selected a range of towns with experience attracting and retaining newcomers to represent a cross-section of different sizes, demographics, socio-political contexts and approaches.

## Canada

- Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Fredericton, New Brunswick
- Ottawa
- Belleville, Ontario
- Guelph, Ontario
- Mississauga, Ontario
- Owen Sound, Ontario

## USA

- St Joseph, Minnesota
- St Cloud, Minnesota
- Missoula, Montana

## Germany

- Kempten, Bavaria
- Immenstadt, Bavaria
- Sonthofen, Bavaria

## Norway

- Bodø, Nordland County
- Svolvær, Nordland County
- Leknes, Nordland County
- Ramberg, Nordland County

## Sweden

- Åre, Jämtland County
- Mörsil, Jämtland County
- Järpen, Jämtland County



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# Recommendations

I propose the following recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration:

1. Involve people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in all elements of attraction and retention initiatives and policy making.
2. Implement place-based approaches which involve all levels of government, community and business. Doing so could break down information and program silos, thereby enhancing efficiency and potential resource and knowledge sharing.
3. Invest in social capital building and creating connections between newcomers and community members.
4. Build the capacity of mainstream services and programs to meet the specific needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
5. Develop a more strategic approach to engaging with migrants and refugees in cities to actively market regional employment and lifestyle opportunities.
6. Help regional employers to recruit, develop and retain a culturally diverse workforce.
7. Demonstrate leadership by communicating the benefits of immigration and contribution migrants and refugees make to society. Investing in community consensus building and preparedness is a key determinant of newcomer retention.

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# Summary of findings

1. Involve people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in all elements of attraction and retention initiatives and policy making.

Talking to existing migrant and refugee communities in regional towns can offer rich and unique insights into a community's strengths and weaknesses. The most effective attraction and retention strategies have moved beyond consultation to involving newcomers in planning and decision-making discussions. Involving newcomers can help a community to understand, from their perspective, what is working well, and where any gaps in services may be.

## **Case Study: Newcomer First Impressions Survey - Huron County, Canada**

In developing their newcomer attraction strategy, Huron County in South East Ontario, Canada decided to bring outsiders in to help them articulate what they had to offer and identify what could be made better within their community. They thought that the people best placed to evaluate the attractiveness of their community for potential newcomers, were potential newcomers themselves. The County got together with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Caldwell Consulting and developed the Newcomer First Impressions Community Evaluation (NFICE). The NFICE survey invited newcomers to visit Exeter, a town of about 4,500 people in Huron County and give feedback based on their first impressions of services, education, employment, retail business, housing and the receptivity of the community to newcomers.

Six newcomers to Canada (including refugees and migrants) living in the nearby city of Guelph were engaged to participate. They represented a range of age, gender, family and career interests and were all interested in moving to a smaller community. A pre-survey before the visit captured basic demographic information and invited participants to learn online what they can about Exeter. This provided insights into the accessibility of relevant online information about the town, preconceptions and what participants considered as important in their decision to relocate. Housing (and rental rates) was at the top of the list.

On the day of the visit, participants were divided into pairs and allocated sites ranging from the local grocery store to health clinics. They then disclosed their impressions in a survey looking at eight topic areas: First impressions; Housing and residential areas; Local government services; Health and wellness; Downtown and local businesses; Restaurants; Describing the overall visit; and Debriefing.

The NFICE has helped Huron County to develop new strategies to ensure that the first impression of a potential newcomer to the community is a positive one. Across the board, participants found Exeter to be a welcoming place and this is now held up and celebrated as a cornerstone of what the community has to offer. Surprisingly, one of the most

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positive impressions related to the quality of day care. This is something which the community hadn't previously identified as an asset and now seek to profile as part of their attraction efforts. Several other areas of improvement such as profiling up-to-date information about housing and employment have gone on to shape activities.

## 2. Implement place-based approaches which involve all levels of government, community and business. Doing so could break down information and program silos, thereby enhancing efficiency and potential resource and knowledge sharing.

Thriving regional towns that have succeeded attracting newcomers have usually done this through input and involvement across multiple sectors and groups, from ordinary citizens to business leaders, police to health services, schools to indigenous elders. While efforts are often initiated by a passionate individual or group, taking it forward requires collaborative networks to build a vision and achieve common goals. The role and leadership of local government is critical. Initiatives should be integrated with a community's long-term economic development strategy rather than seen as a way to help vulnerable refugees or a temporary solution for labour shortages.

Place-based approaches can help align resources and efforts across different levels of government and avoid duplication. Establishing mechanisms to engage with employers and map local skills and workforce needs can help communities more clearly articulate what qualities they are looking for and target these cohorts.

### **Case Study: Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council – Canada**

People in Fredericton are acutely aware of the urgency to attract and retain newcomers. They live in New Brunswick, the province with the fastest declining population in Canada. Between 2011 and 2016, the population dropped by 0.5% due to an ageing population (20% over 65 years old), youth out-migration and a low birth rate. With a critical shortage of skilled and unskilled workers, this is having a significant impact on the local economy and sustainability of the town.

These challenges paved the way for the formation of the Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council (NPC) in 2015. Led by local economic development agency Ignite Fredericton, the NPC is a multi-sectoral committee that aims to improve newcomer settlement, integration and retention through partnerships, collaboration and communication. The committee meets quarterly and is Co-Chaired by an elected Councillor and staff member from the City of Fredericton. It has 15 members from diverse sectors of the community including school boards, settlement services, police, chamber of commerce, health, university, vocational training, and provincial government.

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The Fredericton Newcomer Partnership Council is jointly funded by the federal Canadian Government and the Province of New Brunswick. It is part of the Local Immigration Partnerships (LIP) program, a federal government initiative which has been rolled out in 66 communities across Canada. The LIPs operate at municipal level and bring together local partnerships of all levels of government, civil society and non-government organisations to enhance community effectiveness in building and promoting settlement services and creating a sense of belonging for newcomers.

Local working committees feed into the NPC to drive seven strategic areas forward:

1. Integration
2. Welcoming & Safe Communities
3. Employment & Training
4. Children & Youth
5. Entrepreneurship
6. International Student Retention
7. Health

The NPC has been the catalyst for creating a culture of collaboration and innovation across community, government and business in Fredericton. It has made newcomer attraction and retention a main topic of discussion and enabled initiatives and services to be streamlined and better coordinated. Measures to build “a welcoming and supportive city” are now clearly written into the city’s 25-year Growth Strategy, a clear statement from the City of Fredericton that a welcoming community is good for economic growth.

In June 2019, the NPC announced a new 5-year immigration strategy that sets the ambitious target of increasing the population by 1,000 new residents annually over the next 25 years. As 1,470 newcomers arrived in 2018, Fredericton is well on its way. As the competition for newcomers ramps up between declining regional Canadian towns, Fredericton hopes that it is their sense of welcome that makes the difference between someone choosing their town over another.

### **Case study: Nordland County In-Migration Project - Norway**

In 2013, Nordland County in northern Norway realised they had a big problem on their hands. Nordland encompasses an area of 38,000km<sup>2</sup> and includes 44 municipalities. The region, famous for its significant mineral resources, fishing and tourism industries, had become overly dependent on short-term foreign labour. Workers, mostly from Eastern Europe, would fly in for several months at a time then return home, taking their pay checks with them. With over 40% of the local workforce projected to reach retirement by 2030, the region was in big economic trouble.

While some municipalities in the region were doing their best to hold onto their young people, their efforts were barely making a dent in the situation. Given the size and remoteness of many of the municipalities, the challenge was too great for most to tackle on their own. Complicating things, the low-skilled, manual nature of most of the jobs on



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offer meant few educated Norwegians wanted them. The only option left was to find a new labour force.

In 2013 Nordland County therefore launched its In-Migration Project, a pilot which sought to attract 10,000 new long-term inhabitants to the region by 2018. The aim of the pilot was to encourage municipalities to think holistically about regional attractiveness through enhanced cooperation between government, business and civil society organisations. Seven municipalities opted in to the pilot. They were each supported with regional funding to implement their own local projects, ranging from a seasonal worker retention project in Flakstad to a farming initiative for refugees in Nesna.

The success of the program has been its ability to leverage expertise, resources and opportunities across the whole region. Establishing a mentoring network across all the participating municipalities helped towns share what they were learning, improve coordination between towns and showcase the successes. This also led to collaborative solutions to address major barriers, such as housing shortages.

By 2018, the project had successfully attracted 6,300 long-term immigrants to the region in addition to the many more seasonal workers. While not quite reaching its target and the population is still not growing, Nordland has at least managed to stabilise things and stem its rapid decline.

### 3. Invest in social capital building and creating connections between newcomers and community members.

Feeling connected to your neighbours and community leads to higher levels of life satisfaction and ultimately supports your decision to stay in a place. But for people who are new to a town without family or friends, social networks are especially important to reduce isolation and enable access to resources and support.

The well-established social circles in small towns can, however, often make it hard for newcomers to feel part of the community, particularly when there are any added cultural and language barriers. Breaking down these barriers, between townspeople and newcomers, requires intentional strategies and coordination to ensure that people have the chance to get involved in community activities and make new connections.

Buddy or mentoring programs have proven to be great ways to build support and friendships for newcomers. But not everyone has the time or interest in one-on-one volunteering. It is also important to create a range of ways for everybody in the community to be exposed to different cultures and connect with newcomers.

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### **Case study: Språkcafé (Language Café) - Åre, Sweden**

The Åre *Språkcafé* meets weekly on Tuesday nights in the small town of Åre, Sweden. On an average night around 40 newcomers and locals attend. The room at the local parish centre is buzzing with energy and laughter as people of all ages and backgrounds enjoy good conversation, play card games and share food. It's a place where newcomers feel safe and welcomed and is often the first port of call for people when they land in town. When one young African man suddenly found himself without a home, volunteers rallied to offer up their home as temporary accommodation and help the man get on his feet. The connections made at the *Språkcafé* go beyond developing Swedish language to open up channels of help and create a sense of belonging.

### **Case study: Community action - St Joseph, Minnesota, US**

When Somali refugees started relocating to the strongly Catholic and Lutheran town of St Joseph from other parts of the US, the community drew upon its shared Christian value of 'hospitality' to extend a warm welcome. In the quiet, rural Minnesotan town of 7000 people, Saint Benedict's Monastery and College and Saint John's University formed the nucleus for community action.

Many of the families were vulnerable female-headed households with low levels of English and very isolated from the community. With no settlement services in town, it was up to local community members to help the families get on their feet.

The church called upon its congregation to implement English classes staffed by volunteers, using space in the basement of the college. The university and college established Circles of Understanding aimed at building relationships and understanding between students and Somalis and adapted its Liberal Arts curriculum to include a practical service component that encouraged students to get involved. The standing and trust held by these institutions was vital in activating volunteers and building a welcoming and receptive community for the new refugees.

### **Case study: High school buddy program - Kempten, Germany**

The first young refugees to arrive in the ordinarily quiet town of Kempten, Germany, were met with suspicion by their German peers. The young people, mostly from the Middle East and Africa, were enrolled in a specialised German language school close to the local high school. But this had the unintended consequence of segregating the newcomers from other locals their age, leading to tensions among groups. So a high school teacher came up with the idea to initiate a buddy program. Now, each day from 1-2pm, high school students stream into the language school to play games, read and just hang out together. Tensions have been overcome and new friendships have been made.

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#### 4. Build the capacity of mainstream services and programs to meet the specific needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

A newcomer should be able to walk into any door of any service or organisation and access the same level of services as anyone else. Taking the time to consider what barriers people face to inclusion and coming up with collective solutions can have lasting impacts on the experience of newcomers and ultimately the entire community.

##### **Case study: Decentralising settlement services – Bruce Grey, Canada**

The “Making Grey Bruce Home” project rolled out cultural humility training for 133 services dotted across the rural countries of Grey and Bruce in Ontario, Canada. Cultural humility is a perspective that involves practicing lifelong learning, exercising self-reflection and critique and recognising the dynamics of power and privilege. With an increasing number of refugees and migrants moving to the region and no local settlement organisation in place, it was important to ensure existing services were equipped to meet newcomers’ needs. The project mapped services across the region and developed a training package for services ranging from child and family supports, health clinics and County Government administration staff that ensured identified skills and knowledge gaps were addressed.

*“Rather than having one organisation to provide settlement services, we have tried to build a decentralised model where settlement services are provided by different organisations in different communities. We try to help services build their capacity to work with newcomers and include newcomers in their clientele”* May Ip, Project Coordinator, United Way of Bruce Grey.

##### **Case study: My Community – make yourself at home – Oberallgäu, Germany**

In Oberallgäu, Germany, a project intended to drive inclusion in all levels of society through civic engagement was the perfect foundation from which to coordinate refugee support efforts across the region.

The ‘Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für alle’ (My Community – make yourself at home) project was established by not-for-profit organisation Caritas in 2012 in partnership with the local regional development agency, Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu. The vision for the project was that all people should have the freedom to shape their life, participate in community activities, have equal opportunities and free access to social, political and cultural life, and work.

When refugees started streaming into the region from 2015, there wasn’t any time to put services and structures in place. The instant and urgent need of these newcomers relied heavily on volunteers, who came forward in their hundreds to respond. The local working groups established as part of Meine Gemeinde became the ideal means to steer refugee support and inclusion activities.

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The Caritas Project Coordinator worked with local government across the region's 28 municipalities to form volunteer teams in each village which could plan and coordinate local activities. While there was initial concern from many locals, once refugees arrived they were greeted as neighbours in need of help. Personal connections broke down fear and galvanised more and more locals to get involved. At the height of the efforts, across the region there were over 1,500 volunteers who came from existing groups, associations and churches.

Caritas' focus was on building the capacity of volunteer teams, continually coming back to the vision of inclusion for all. As a regional coordination point their role included:

- providing guidance and advice to volunteers and responding to questions and concerns
- communicating regular information and updates about refugee arrivals, policies and services
- facilitating inter-municipal communication and coordination
- holding community meetings and information sessions.

Many volunteer teams were initiating innovative projects that weren't immediately visible to surrounding villages. These ranged from clothing distribution centres, to gardening projects and homework tutoring for school kids. Caritas established an online platform called *Inklusionsmelder* (Inclusion Detector) so local communities could post details of their activities and highlight best practices across the region. This tool helped spark new ideas and connected volunteer teams, building a regional network of mentoring and support.

## 5. Develop a more strategic approach to engaging with migrants and refugees in cities to actively market regional employment and lifestyle opportunities.

To successfully connect refugees and migrants in cities with regional towns, it is important to be clear on what each party is looking for. Taking time to understand the skills, characteristics and motivations of newcomers as well as the social and economic objectives of the regional town, helps to make the right match.

Immigration promotion resources and campaigns can be an effective way to get the message out about regional towns to a broad audience. While the features and selling points of a town might have broad appeal, the way this information is communicated will need to change depending on the audience and different strategies will be needed for migrants and refugees. The most effective campaigns have been when towns are able to portray a welcoming image that celebrates their multicultural identity.

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## **Case study: The Rural Employment Initiative - Greater Toronto Area, Canada**

More than half of Canada's immigrants and refugees go to MTV (Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver). In the Greater Toronto Area, there is a concentration in the Peel Region, with immigrants accounting for 51.5% of the population. After an initial period of intensive job-seeking, it doesn't take long for many newcomers to realise the serious competition for work.

As the main settlement organisation in Mississauga, a city within Peel, the Newcomer Centre of Peel (NCP) is the first stop for most of the new-arrivals. In 2016, they started the Rural Employment Initiative to offer rural employment as an alternative option for the increasing number of newcomers unable to find work. The program connects jobseekers with employment opportunities in rural areas that are in line with their skills and experience.

NCP staff take care to ensure that jobs are located in businesses and towns where newcomers and their families will be embraced. They have developed partnerships with a range of towns across Ontario where the community has demonstrated they have done the necessary groundwork to be welcoming and inclusive.

*"This is a long-term program. We're not about a quick fix. We've had requests from people for 100 employees in manufacturing. That's not going to happen and is not what this is about. You can't move 100 people into a manufacturing plant. They will stay maybe two weeks and then come back to Toronto",* Tania Maximenko, Project Coordinator, NCP.

### **Lessons from the Rural Employment Initiative:**

#### **Help people to weigh up their options**

Helping someone to secure rural employment involves intensive and individualised support. NCP staff guide their clients through the decision-making process, starting with their skills, work experience and career aspirations. The needs and values of each client are also an important part of the equation. The goal is to find the right fit for that individual or family, not only with the job, but the rural community itself. For example, if someone has medical needs, access to a hospital should be prioritised.

Clients are educated on job application techniques, including the importance of showing rural employers their interest in both the business as well as the community as a whole. Openly discussing potential challenges helps clients be as prepared as possible when deciding whether a town is the right one for them. One-on-one conversations are essential to work through any misconceptions and concerns newcomers may have about what it's like to live in a rural Canadian community.

The job match-making process begins with NCP staff promoting candidates widely through their rural networks. Job fairs hosted by NCP have been a great way for jobseekers to connect with employers and sometimes participate in interviews on the spot. When travel is costly, virtual job fairs conducted online offer a convenient and cheap alternative.



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### **Conduct exploration visits to towns**

Most people won't move to an unfamiliar place without an initial visit. Organising group bus visits to rural towns has been a great way for NCP clients to see and experience a potential new home.

On a bus visit organised by NCP, about thirty newcomer jobseekers toured and met with businesses in Owen Sound, about two hours' drive northwest of Toronto. Many had been in touch with employers before the visit but being there, and speaking to locals in person, gave them a better sense of what it would be like to live and work in the town. The visit left participants with a strong impression of 'welcome' which started from the moment they arrived and were greeted by the Deputy Mayor, local services and community volunteers. It helped alleviate concerns and determine whether Owen Sound was the right fit for them. For example, the lack of public transport meant that having a car and driver license would be essential. Some participants who had been concerned about a potential lack of amenities were surprised to see the town actually had a Walmart.

### **Use technology to overcome distance**

Located over 900km from Toronto, an active and personalised online presence has helped Thunder Bay overcome its geographical isolation and market itself as an appealing destination for newcomers.

The Thunder Bay International and Community Matchmaker project is an initiative of the Northern Policy Institute. The program uses technology to connect migrants already in Canada (including NCP clients) to employers in Ontario's northern regions that are desperately seeking skilled workers. Matchmaker Advisors based in the region provide personalised advice to jobseekers considering making the move. These consults are usually over the phone or by Skype and can range from simple tips and action plans for job searching, to help starting a business. A large part of the Advisor's role is also to offer local knowledge on what life is like in Thunder Bay. Weather-related questions are common and they even once conducted a video tour of a rental apartment for someone. To jobseekers, Advisors become a familiar and friendly face waiting for them on the other end of the line.

## **6. Help regional employers to recruit, develop and retain a culturally diverse workforce.**

It is essential that employers are front and centre in any attraction and retention strategy. They have a critical role to play in providing support to newcomers, leveraging their existing skills and experience and upskilling. Investing in settlement and creating welcoming workplaces may take a little extra time and effort for employers but the reward in the form of a loyal, committed and skilled employee is well worth it.

Getting a job is an integral part of putting down roots in a new community but a fulfilling job is the key. New refugees and migrants often work in different fields than their skills or experience, or at different levels. It is important to help people into longer term career pathways rather than just any job.

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### **Case study: Norrmontage, a workplace that invests in newcomer employees - Sweden**

Norrmontage, a substation manufacturer in Åre, Sweden, depends on newcomers to grow its business. Of the 90 employees almost 50% come from a refugee background. The company has worked closely with the local settlement provider to find the right people for jobs that involve operating heavy machinery and attention to detail. With all instructions written in Swedish, language barriers have sometime been a challenge. Most new employees start out in factory-floor roles but are incentivised to develop their Swedish language and technical skills with opportunities to move around the business as their skills develop. Pairing beginner level speakers with native Swedish speakers on shifts helps to improve their ability. For one hour, two times a week, Norrmontage puts on Swedish language classes during work hours.

Employees also have access to the work gym and there are regular opportunities to get to know colleagues with social activities and gatherings organised outside of work. The investment Norrmontage makes in newcomer employees shows that they are part of the long-term business strategy rather than a short-term fix to meet workforce needs. Nowadays the business does most of their recruitment through word of mouth, tapping into newcomer networks in the workplace to recruit family members and friends.

### **Case study: The Connector Program – Canada**

Many jobs in regional towns are hidden and aren't visible through the usual advertising channels. The Connector Program in Halifax, Nova Scotia, helps newcomers tap into hidden jobs by building professional networks which include the business community. A new Canadian refugee, migrant or recent graduate (Connectee) is matched with an established business and community leader (Connectors). They get together for 30 minutes in the Connector's workplace or a coffee shop to discuss industry details, skills and areas of expertise, related news, current market demands and hidden job opportunities in Halifax. Connectors then refer the Connectee to a minimum of three people in their network who may be potential employers, influential industry leaders or other relevant contacts. It is a light touch program which requires a minimal time commitment from the Connector but results in an instant professional network and a foot in the door for the newcomer. Since its launch in 2009, the Connector Program has helped over 1300 people find jobs. It has now been scaled to 35 communities across Canada.

### **Case study: Building an aged care workforce – Bodø, Norway**

With many towns around the world experiencing ageing populations, aged care will continue to be a growth sector in need of a workforce. Bodø Municipality Refugee Office in Norway has found an innovative way to address this by integrating Norwegian language classes with on-the-job training in nursing homes. Refugees who are interested in a career in aged care and have a reasonable level of Norwegian language are enrolled in the program which entails 3 days of Norwegian language training, 1 day of health-specific workplace language training and 1 day of work in a nursing home per week. Work placement days increase over the course of the four-year program and participants graduate with a certificate in enrolled nursing.

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Most participants start their work placement six months after arriving in Norway. This not only allows helps them to rapidly improve their Norwegian but supports the development of soft skills needed to work in a different cultural context. Employers have reported a high level of satisfaction with the program and that it has been a catalyst for improving practices and policies to be more inclusive of employees from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

## **7. Demonstrate leadership by communicating the benefits of immigration and contribution migrants and refugees make to society. Investing in community consensus building and preparedness is a key determinant of newcomer retention.**

Crisis and urgency can be powerful catalysts for embracing new ideas and innovation. For some towns, the Syrian crisis has brought the topic of newcomer attraction to the fore but in others it has been triggered by critical labour shortages. Regardless of the starting point, towns are most successful in attracting and retaining people when there is strong community consensus of the benefits.

When a community understands the population realities it faces, whether it is declining birth rate, the impact of ageing or workforce shortages or any other challenge, they are able to build the business case for newcomer attraction and retention. Sharing stories which tap into people's values and emotions can help to counter misinformation and stereotypes which impact on public perceptions toward refugees. When positive messages come from leaders within the community who are trusted and respected, this helps to build support and reframe newcomers as contributing to social and economic growth.

### **Case study: Galvanising the business sector – Guelph, Canada**

In Guelph, Ontario, Jim Estill was moved by the headlines emerging from the 2015 Syrian War. CEO of a multimillion-dollar appliance company, he teamed up with local religious and community organisations to hatch an ambitious plan; a refugee resettlement initiative to reignite the town and help refugees. In a community hungry for new talent, with low unemployment and workforce shortages, Estill's message was simple: this is the right thing to do for the refugees and the right thing to do for your business.

The first step in this plan was to hold an open-door series of community meetings, each of which drew over 100 attendees. Estill's standing in the community was critical in getting such a broad cross-section of locals to show up. At community meetings, he played a leading role in answering questions and swaying the naysayers. He used his business contacts to convince other business owners and community leaders to get involved, which further galvanised support throughout the community. What started as an individual idea became a collective vision shared by the whole town. Four years on, nearly 100 families have arrived with high retention rates, with many in full-time work.

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### **Case study: #ImmigrationMatters - Canada**

#ImmigrationMatters is a Canadian Government campaign aimed at promoting the benefits of immigration to Canadian society. Officials travel coast to coast convening conversations with regional communities about their population needs and the role that immigration has played, or could play, to help their community flourish. Each conversation features a presentation which sheds light on the local demographic reality and the industries experiencing labour shortages.

### **Case study: Local media engagement – Åre, Sweden**

The newcomer integration team in the rural town of Åre, Sweden partnered with the local newspaper and TV station to share positive news stories of refugees. Showcasing successful examples of refugees in the workplace with employer testimonies generated interest amongst other employers to hire newcomers. The media has also played an important role in highlighting how refugees have contributed to local business growth and jobs creation.

### **Case study: Employer roundtables - Wellington County, Canada**

Wellington County, Ontario, has used employer roundtables to make the business case to local employers for hiring refugees and migrants. Businesses from across the region were invited to an Immigration Summit to consider the economic importance of immigration in rural areas and learn about resources available to help attract and retain newcomer workers. The County Economic Development Office conducted presentations for employers to inform them about future demographic challenges and the role of immigration in mitigating these challenges. Employers who have hired newcomers shared their experiences and strategies for attracting and retaining a workforce.

Wellington County has found that the best people to convince businesses of the benefits of hiring a culturally diverse workforce and investing in the social integration of employees are other employers. Bringing local businesses together not only helps with sharing successful strategies but can also build an ongoing network of support amongst employers.

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# Conclusion

There are many regional towns around the world that have succeeded in becoming more prosperous through migration. The common denominator in each of the towns I visited was a strong sense of welcome and social connectedness which underpinned newcomers' decision to make it their home. Within these communities, 'settlement' was not seen as simply a service delivered by a specialist organisation, but rather the responsibility of the whole community.

Refugee and migrant support initiatives are often started by a small group of locals who are positive about newcomers coming to their town and are keen for intercultural contact. These locals are the ones who will put themselves forward to get involved with welcoming newcomers. But to ensure that the welcome strategy extends to the whole of the community, regional Australian communities need to find ways to leverage these efforts and grow the goodwill.

Coordination and joining up efforts across government, community and business is critical. This helps to maximise resources but also identify actual gaps and address them in a strategic way. Engaging employers to become the champions for newcomer attraction and retention is a powerful strategy. They can also help with communicating the message that social inclusion and welcome is good for business and growth.

More detail on my Churchill Fellowship findings will be available in my report which also includes many more examples of successful regional settlement initiatives from around the world. This will be available on my website from November 2019 at [www.citytocountryproject.com](http://www.citytocountryproject.com)

## About the author

Talia Stump has over 10 years' experience working to enhance the wellbeing and inclusion of refugee communities through policy, research and practice. She is a strong advocate for cross-sectoral collaboration and embedding community development principles in policy and program design.

Talia has held a range of positions within the community sector, academia and government. She currently works as Principal Policy Officer Settlement for the New South Wales (NSW) Government, however the views expressed in this report are her own.

Talia holds a Master of Social Work, Master of Development Studies (Refugees and Displacement) and Bachelor of Arts (Asian Studies).



