

# “Welcoming Claresholm” Settlement, Integration, and Language Project (SILP)

Project Evaluation Report

June 2021

Prepared by

The logo for HABITUS Consulting Collective Inc. features the word "HABITUS" in a stylized, outlined font. The letters are light green with a thin black outline. The 'H' is the tallest, followed by 'A', 'B', 'I', 'T', 'U', and 'S'. Below the word "HABITUS" is the text "Consulting Collective Inc." in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

Consulting Collective Inc.

## Executive Summary

The “Welcoming Claresholm” Settlement, Integration, and Language Project (June 2020 - June 2021) was a timely and effective initiative, supporting the residents of Claresholm, Alberta to raise their awareness of the benefits of immigration and to their role in being a welcoming community. The project engaged service providers, public servants, immigrant and non-immigrant community members, faith groups, educators, and business-owners – with a growing number of committed partners, volunteers, and community champions. Key project outputs are a Welcoming Claresholm Committee, a Welcoming Claresholm website, a series of diversity trainings, and several community-wide events and information sessions. As the project is very early in its planning and implementation, there is consensus that, while impactful, long-term efforts are necessary to create a truly welcoming community that can support the long-term retention of newcomers through localized, evidence-informed strategies. As health restrictions lift there will be increased opportunities to host larger scale events and training sessions and to foster relationships through in-person meetings, ultimately enhancing the pace of outreach efforts. Under the guidance of the Calgary and Foothills Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS & FCIS), the first year of the project has set a strong foundation and generated notable momentum for ongoing work

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## I. Introduction

### a. Introduction to the evaluation

This report provides a summary of findings from an evaluation of the Welcoming Claresholm Settlement, Integration, and Language Partnership (SILP). The evaluation included:

- Key stakeholder/staff interviews (N=5)
- Document review, literature and media scan
- Impact Survey to project participants and partners (N=28)
- Observation of final (for contract period) Welcoming Claresholm Committee meeting
- Website Feedback Survey (developed within scope of evaluation for ongoing data collection; findings not reported here)

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to capture a story of the SILP initiative, document key milestones or achievements, and identify project strengths and opportunities for ongoing and/or comparable work in the future.

### b. Introduction to Welcoming Claresholm

The Welcoming Claresholm project's overarching goal was to engage the community, as a whole, in the imperative to welcome, support, and retain newcomers to the local community. The project had a focus on:

- a. capacity building for various community stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in newcomer settlement, including service providers, educators, and volunteers, to foster the conditions for inclusion; and
- b. establishing an Advisory Committee to lead collaboration and coordination in the long term, with a focus on identifying local gaps and assets so to leverage those into strategic opportunities.
- c. newcomer navigation supports to ensure there are opportunities for newcomers to be welcomed into and introduced to the community and available resources.

Impact of COVID-19: A fundamental challenge for the SILP project was that it was established during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health restrictions; while this did not affect the ability to complete the intended activities it did extend the overall time required to complete those activities, limited opportunities for in-person or group meetings and events, and likely created barriers for some potential participants.

While not a direct impact on the SILP project, COVID-19 travel restrictions also limited the expected flow of newcomers to the community during the period. The original contract was extended by three months, from March to June 2021, to accommodate for various community engagement limitations imposed by the pandemic. In being extended, the project was able to take advantage of loosened restrictions to host a community-wide multicultural event at the end of June.

## II. About Claresholm

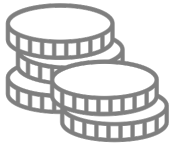
The following is a profile of the Claresholm community, based on data from the 2016 Census<sup>i</sup>:



3,424 residents  
47.7% over the age of 55 years<sup>1</sup>.



Workforce largely employed within mining, oil and gas, health care, transportation and warehousing, agriculture, and local businesses.  
34% of the total workforce population is over the age of 55<sup>2</sup>.



The median total household income is \$57,254/year<sup>3</sup>

Claresholm is a small, well-educated community, with a workforce and overall population that is aging more quickly than most communities in the province. Throughout Canada, an 'aging population' presents various challenges such as a shrinking workforce and increased demand on social and medical supports. A 2018 survey conducted by Claresholm's Economic Development Office<sup>ii</sup> found that workforce shortages were major challenges for businesses across sectors and impeded their ability to operate at their full

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<sup>1</sup> as compared to 24.7% of Albertans

<sup>2</sup> higher than other communities in Southern Alberta (which are between 17% - 21%) and Alberta as a whole (at 21%);

<sup>3</sup> lower than Alberta's median of \$93,835/year

potential. This challenge can be further exacerbated by the out-migration of youth that is common in smaller communities<sup>iii</sup>.



70% third or more generation Canadians<sup>4</sup>

97% Canadian citizens



8% born outside Canada

0.9% born outside Canada and arrived <5 years prior

45% of immigrants from UK or USA

4.7% of community members are from a visible minority group<sup>5</sup>

For many communities in Canada, immigration has been and continues to be the main source of population growth. In 2016, the majority of Claresholm residents (70%), however, were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents and most 'newcomers' have arrived from other regions in Canada. In 2016, less than 1% of residents (30 people) were recent immigrants (meaning they had arrived in the five years prior), as compared to 5% of Albertans; and a total 8% of the Claresholm population was born outside Canada, compared to 21% of all Albertans and 32% of Calgarians.

On the whole, the immigrant population is also less ethnically and linguistically diverse than for the province as a whole: in 2016, 45% of immigrants were born in the UK or USA, as compared to 11% of all immigrants living in Alberta. However, recent immigration showed a distinct trend toward arrivals from the Philippines, accounting for 86% of newcomers to Claresholm as compared to 29% for Alberta. The breakdown of immigration streams (economic, immigrants, and refugees) compared to the province as a whole.

Overall, these statistics show workforce shortages, an aging population, and a low rate of immigration. While the former two are major economic concerns for Claresholm, the latter is a prominent solution. Attracting and retaining immigrants could help economic maintenance and growth, entrepreneurial endeavors, and health care demands, while contributing to a vibrant social and cultural life within Claresholm. Failing to address

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<sup>4</sup> Meaning Canadian-born with both parents also born in Canada

<sup>5</sup> As compared to 23.5% of Albertans

these demographics by encouraging the arrival and retention of immigrants, could mean that Claresholm loses some of its important economic activity to other communities<sup>6</sup>.

### III. What is a Welcoming Community?

The following section provides a high-level overview of common approaches to community initiatives focused on the attraction and retention of newcomers. These projects are a generally in response to changing demographics and do not focus on direct supports but on ensuring the whole community is prepared to welcome, include, and accept the contributions of newcomers and minority groups. They are often motivated and/or informed by principles of multiculturalism, anti-racism, and equity, diversity, inclusion, and access (EDIA).



“Building support and engaging community members right from the beginning is critically important to the successful development and implementation of an effective community immigrant attraction and retention strategy” – CIRRO pp19

The trajectory of initiatives such as this, that are focused on broad community or organizational level change, is to first make issues and considerations around diversity and inclusion visible, then to raise awareness through education and the provision of information. Subsequently, social and institutional recognition become possible, as do behavioral and structural change. And finally, goals can shift toward integrating and embedding the values, principles, and practices of a welcoming community into all aspects of social and institutional life.

Based on a brief resource scan<sup>7iv</sup>, facilitating factors of successful welcoming community initiatives across Canada are:

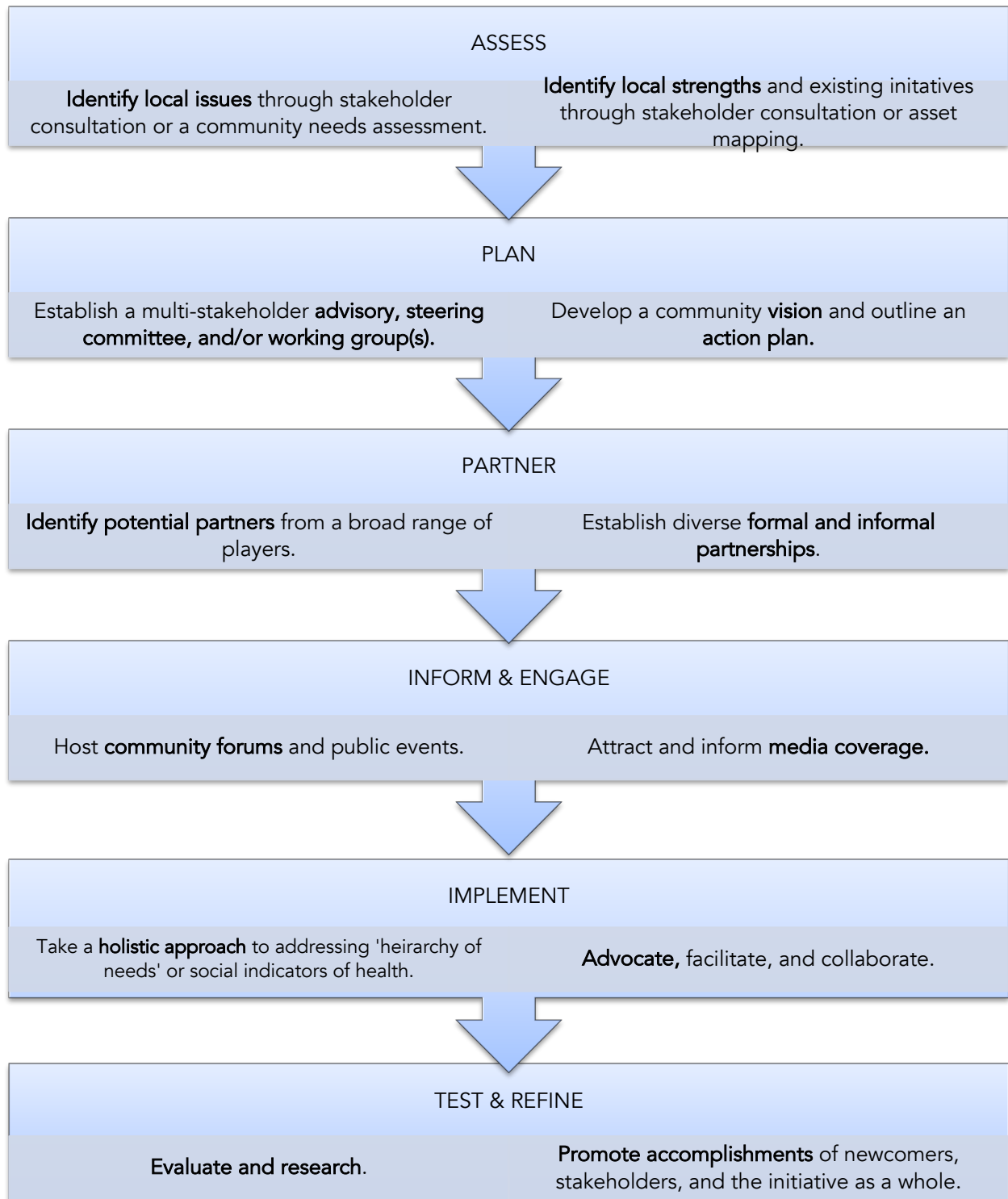
- Experienced and dedicated staff with content and/or context knowledge.
- Active involvement of immigrant and non-immigrant community members and other diverse stakeholders – including businesses and non-profits, governments and grassroots organizations, faith groups and schools.
- Centering the expertise of those with lived experience through all phases of work.
- Commitment, buy-in, leadership, and/or partnership from local government.
- Positive media coverage.
- Flexibility, creativity, and innovation to adapt to local needs and emergent opportunities.
- Long-term funding to sustain work.

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<sup>6</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Summary of themes identified across the following resources: *Attracting and Retaining Immigrants: A Toolbox of ideas for smaller centres* (NWGSCS, 2007); *Characteristics of a Welcoming Community* (Esses, Hamilton, Bennet-AbuAyyash, and Burstein, 2010); and “Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Toolkit” (AUMA, 2011).

While each community is unique and there are numerous ways such initiatives have been and are being implemented across North America, the following is a summary of a 'typical' process and some of the high-level activities that may be undertaken:

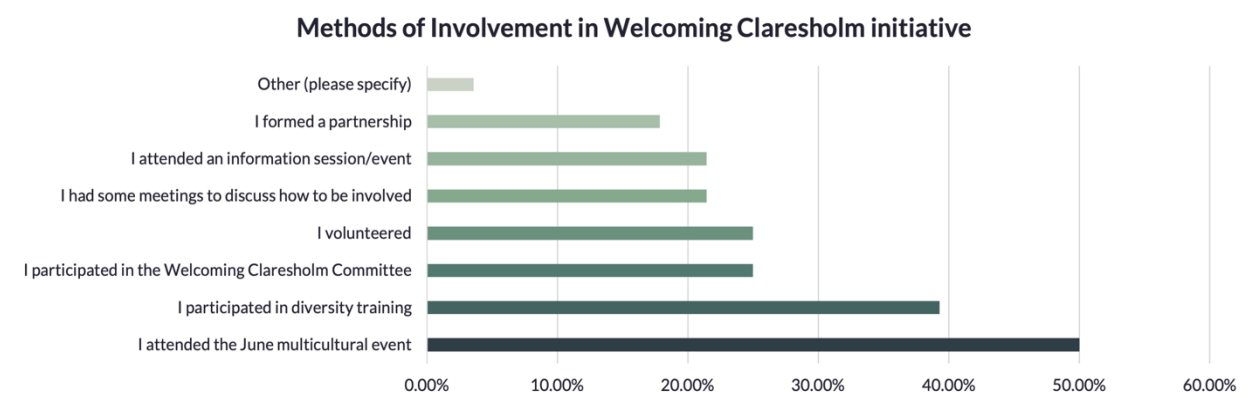




## IV. Key SILP Activities: year one

The activities of the Welcoming Claresholm SILP are consistent with how other communities have started such work and show consideration for promising practices as well as flexibility to local context.

According to survey respondents there were **diverse opportunities to engage** with the SILP, with most respondents having engaged in more than one way. Of the respondents, half attended the June 'Spread the World' multicultural event and 39% participated in Diversity Training. Other forms of involvement included Committee participation (25% of respondents), volunteerism (25%), preliminary/informational meetings (21%), information session attendance (21%), and formal partnership (18%). Most survey respondents noted that they were involved as a non-immigrant community member (46%) and/or as an employer/employee (29%), with some involved in more than one capacity.



SILP Team members identified **20 new partnerships** that were formed under the initiative, including with: literacy providers, educational and post-secondary institutions, health services, small/medium businesses, employment services, the Chamber of Commerce, local press, RCMP, and non-secular groups. The SILP also participated in a University of Alberta & Rural Development Network (RDN) research project and is finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding with the RDN & the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy for another research project that will contribute to the local knowledge base.

A summary of key activities and related strengths and opportunities follows:

Staff hired (July 2020), n=2: The core project team included a Community Outreach and a Community Engagement Coordinator, with leadership provided by CCIS. The outreach

staff member had a focus on networking and meeting with stakeholders, whereas the engagement coordinator had a focus on strategy and building interconnections.

- Strengths: Between them, the project team had a balance of non-profit experience, lived experience, and personal connections with the Claresholm community. Localized knowledge and relationships were identified as particularly helpful to the requirements of the project, which in this phase of work were focused on building connections within the community. The leadership of an experienced immigrant-serving agency was identified as a facilitating factor, providing content knowledge and efficient onboarding to the project goals and activities.
- Opportunities: Interviewees expressed the importance of staff who are committed to the vision of the work as there will be ongoing efforts required to generate support and momentum, and in the long-term to action meaningful and sustainable solutions. As the project transitions to a two-year contract under the Town of Claresholm's Economic Development Office, the project will have new opportunities to establish trust and partnerships in the local community. Ongoing collaboration with CCIS/FCIS will be an asset to the project by providing content-expertise, and co-location with Willow Creek Immigrant Services will facilitate ease of connection to resettlement services.

Welcome Event (August): in partnership with RNIP, this event welcomed newcomers to the community as well as introduced the SILP initiative and staff and introduced Willow Creek Immigrant Services.

Information sessions, n=5: The team provided a series of presentations outlining the work of the work of the SILP and Willow Creek Immigrant Services to select audiences such as the Town of Claresholm Council. Early sentiments to the project were described as mixed, with residents and stakeholders expressing a range of sentiments including support, curiosity, and anger. Project staff found that many negative sentiments could be addressed through education and described the overall level of openness to and support for the initiative to have increased over the length of the project.

- Strengths: Events were a good way to reach a large and diverse catchment of residents. Staff effectively managed community readiness and resident champions emerged as supporters of the Welcoming Claresholm concept. A street-front office was also identified as an asset to the project. While not

maximized due to health restrictions, staff identified that the added visibility and a space to just walk into to learn more about the project supported awareness building.

- Opportunities: Ongoing community-wide forums and information sessions, using digital and in-person methods, will continue to be important mechanisms to provide project updates, respond to resident questions, and raise awareness of the initiative. Ongoing press relationships will also enhance awareness of ongoing activities and foster a continuous narrative around the project and changing community demographics.

#### Welcoming Claresholm Advisory Committee and Terms of Reference established; 9

meetings: The Welcoming Claresholm Committee is considered one of the primary outputs or 'legacy pieces' of the project. Staff reported a positive response to outreach activities and an overall Committee composed of a group of committed community members, including immigrants, service providers, public servants, and business owners. A few members have chosen to remain peripherally informed but have limited participation at this time. Three subcommittees were also formed over the course of the year to support specific projects.

- Strengths: One of the key strengths was the emphasis on lived experience participants within the Welcoming Claresholm Committee. This was an intentional outcome of outreach efforts, with the goal to give leadership to those with experience of resettlement in the community. Their lens provided important insight into project activities and areas of focus. Furthermore, the Committee provides a platform for volunteerism and civic engagement. Police representation at the last committee meeting showed the intention to build positive rapport between immigrant populations in Claresholm and law enforcement, through activities such as assisting with future events and community outreach.
- Opportunities: Ongoing and consistent engagement of Committee members will be a focus in the years ahead, as will generating actionable ideas and strategies. Ideas noted by Committee members during their June meeting included: supporting the CCIS & FCIS Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) programs in Claresholm, including both TFWs and employers; talking to local businesses and industries about their equity and inclusion policies and how

these are implemented; empowering community members to do things ‘with’ immigrants rather than ‘for’ them, in order to instill participatory solutions; developing or working with a local coffee shop to host times where people from diverse backgrounds can meet to engage in meaningful conversations and relationship building; and develop an regular newsletter.

Committee initiatives: As a gesture to welcome five new RNIP families to the community and to introduce them to Thanksgiving traditions, the Welcoming Claresholm Committee partnered with MyCityCare and five sponsoring families to deliver everything needed to make a Thanksgiving dinner. As part of the community’s Old Fashioned Christmas activities, the Committee arranged a Scavenger Hunt to introduce newcomers to Claresholm businesses, offered in partnership with WICS, 10 local businesses, and the Pentecostal Assembly. They also invited newcomers to hang an ornament reflecting their cultural origins on the town tree.

Welcoming Claresholm Website launch (May): The website is a second key legacy piece of the project. While time intensive, the development of the website was successfully co-developed with contributions from Committee Members. This included those with experience as newcomers to the community providing insight into what information could have better supported them prior to or upon arrival, as well as research and content contributions from all Committee members.

- Strengths: The SILP staff and Committee took a collaborative, flexible approach to determining and developing content that integrated community knowledge and lived experience. The site is connected to the municipal website to facilitate access and signal formal support for the initiative. The website provides a suite of important information about life in Claresholm and the services available; while focused on information relevant to newcomers it also provides information about the initiative and ways to be involved.
- Opportunities: Now that the website is established, the SILP Committee and staff can develop a strategy to drive traffic to the website, including via Immigrant Serving Agencies, employment programs, and word of mouth referrals. As the website continues to be refined and expanded, it can integrate local imagery of everyday life and over build more culturally relevant or first-language content, via consultation with newcomer groups.

Diversity workshops, n=3; participants=52: A series of Diversity Trainings were coordinated through the SILP initiative. Participants included community members at large, teachers, employers, and service providers. Trainings were coordinated by the SILP via their outreach activities however were delivered by a CCIS staff person.

- Strengths: Diversity trainings were considered an important and impactful aspect of the project. The availability of CCIS staff to deliver these pre-existing trainings allowed SILP staff to focus on direct outreach. The project team has identified several organizations that are interested in providing training to their full staff.
- Opportunities: Based on interest in and effectiveness of the trainings, there is a clear opportunity to continue offering education to diverse stakeholders, including community members at large. With reduced health restrictions, the staff can explore in-person and larger-scale training events. A notable opportunity will be to create internal capacity (knowledge, facilitation skills, time) to deliver or co-deliver trainings. A recommendation given, that can perhaps be executed by leveraging the shift to the project being led by the municipality, is to provide these trainings to all staff at the Town of Claresholm. Post-workshop evaluations can track immediate learning outcomes while later follow-ups can track the application of knowledge.

Employer engagement sessions, n=2; participants=25: These employer specific engagement sessions were effective in fostering awareness among workplaces both in terms of how they can be welcoming to immigrant consumers and/or employees as well as why they might consider foreign talent to fill job vacancies.

Mentor recruitment, n=3: Three volunteer mentors were identified to provided dedicated, 1:1 support to newcomers gaining familiarity with the local community.

“Spread the World” multicultural event (June)<sup>8</sup>, n=103 participants: The purpose of this event was to begin to draw attention to the existing ethno-cultural communities represented within the Claresholm community in hopes that participants would be inspired to learn more about the initiative and/or their community members, and that they might reflect on their own cultural and ethnic origins. The focus was to share general

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<sup>8</sup> [Event footage](#)

information, such as some key statistics on countries of origin, recipes, music, and flags, and to generally create an opportunity for community members to come together.

- Strengths: The event was adapted to changing health restrictions, demonstrating the flexibility and creativity of the SILP team. The event took a collaborative approach and engaged 25 volunteers and integrated the contributions of 55 students, Willow Creek Immigrant Services, the Welcoming Claresholm Committee, the Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society, Claresholm and District Chamber of Commerce, Claresholm and District Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), and Claresholm Economic Development.<sup>9</sup> The event was filmed, creating a short video which can be posted on the Town of Claresholm’s website to spread awareness to those not in attendance or used as a marketing tool for future events.
- Opportunities: Feedback presented at the Welcoming Claresholm Committee meeting highlighted that this event was well-received, with participants asking for it to happen again next year with increased representation from other countries. Similarly, survey participants commended a successful event and expressed interest in future events. When sharing food and speaking about culture, conversations could also be tailored to help people reflect on their own styles of inclusivity: What are your own cultural or ethnic origins? Why is it important to be welcoming to immigrant populations? What kinds of things are you currently doing or could you do to promote inclusivity or diversity? Events such as this present a notable opportunity for fostering cross-cultural connections and engaging residents and organizations as volunteers and donors.

## V. System Context

The following section provides more detail into the role of Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) as the year one contract holder and backbone organization for the SILP, as well as a review of other local initiatives also contributing to the overarching goal of attracting and retaining immigrant newcomers to Claresholm. The Welcoming Claresholm is uniquely timed and

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<sup>9</sup> [Local press on event](#)

supported within an emerging system of attract and retain initiatives led by CCIS and the Town of Claresholm Economic Development Office.

#### a. Project backbone

This year the project contract was held by Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS). This model was strong, particularly for the initiation of such a project. The content knowledge, leadership, and experience of CCIS was considered fundamental to the success of the project. Their guidance supported the rapid orientation of staff to the project goals, impactful decision-making, and the maintenance of clear project boundaries. CCIS also contributed complementary supports such as a facilitator for pre-developed diversity trainings. The extensive knowledge of the organization in supporting newcomers and in fostering welcoming communities, including experience in rural and small community settings, added significant value to the work.

Moving forward, the project will be led by the Town of Claresholm Economic Development Office. CCIS has sustained a strong partnership with the Economic Development Office throughout the project which will facilitate a smooth transition. Furthermore, the Office has emerged as a notable champion for the work and vision of the Welcoming Claresholm initiative as a whole. Core strengths of the new model are that the project will be locally 'owned' and has greater potential to become embedded in municipal processes and structures.

#### b. Complementary initiatives

A unique and important aspect of the SILP project is its interconnection with several other initiatives, which together have begun to create a system of attract-support-retain for newcomers to Claresholm. While not direct impacts or components of the SILP project itself, interviewees have identified that these components, when considered together, support the overall goals, and impacts of the SILP project as does the SILP initiative contribute to theirs.

The following illustration shows the various components of the system of attract-support-retain that has been established in Claresholm, as it exists currently and as it will be from July 1, 2021 when the SILP contract moves to the Town of Claresholm Economic Development Office. Together, these various initiatives have the potential to increase immigration to the community, facilitate resettlement, support long-term retention, and foster a multicultural community.

Fig 1: Illustration of attract-retain system supports to-date

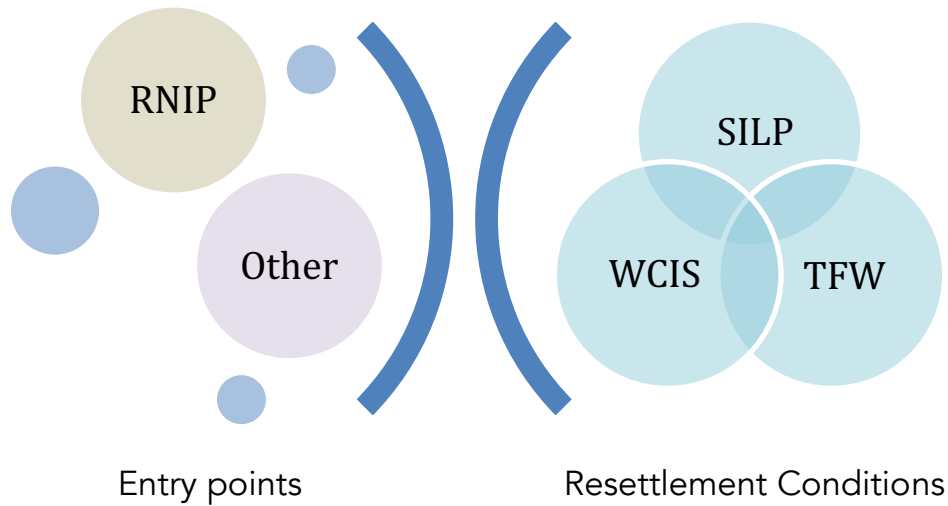
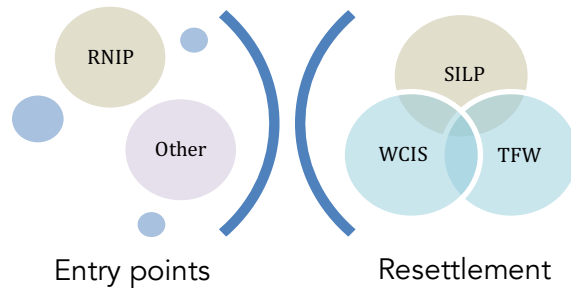


Fig 2: July 1, 2021 SILP contract moves to Town of Claresholm

LEGEND

- CCIS
- Town of Claresholm
- Other



Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP): The RNIP project, led by the Economic Development Office of the Town of Claresholm, is focused on attracting newcomers to the Claresholm community by directly connecting talent with labour market needs and by offering a pathway to Permanent Residence. This project is expected to increase the flows of immigration to the community exponentially, however COVID-19 travel restrictions have delayed the majority of arrivals to-date. This project is notable in that it builds relationships with employers and sets the demand for the Welcoming Claresholm initiative, which can in turn promote the development of responsive and competent systems, increase employer capacity, create timely connections between newcomers and services, and prepare the community at large to welcome their new residents. In sum, while the RNIP will increase arrivals, the SILP can help ensure the community is



welcoming to these newcomers and encourages their long-term retention and integration.

CCIS/FCIS and Willow Creek Immigrant Services (WCIS): Prior to this project, there were no settlement services in the Claresholm community, however CCIS did provide some services from their High River office. It was in-part because the SILP project was rolling out that CCIS took the opportunity to set up a local settlement office. Furthermore, the availability of local settlement services allowed the SILP team to direct clients to those services, which in turn helped maintain the distinction between direct settlement supports and the more community and systems-focused work of the Welcoming Claresholm Project. A local, street front office also had the effect of raising awareness of settlement services and immigration in general, creating a bridge to both newcomer and established community members who would stop by or express curiosity in the office. Moving forward, SILP staff and WCIS staff will share an office allowing for ongoing collaboration and continuity of services.

TFW Prairie Region Project (ESDC): Another initiative that is peripherally connected to the SLIP is the CCIS-led Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Prairie Region Project. This project focuses on outreach and providing information and support to employers and TFW's in rural and small urban centres. This program will have raised awareness among TFW's and employers in the region about some of the services available to them in Claresholm and is additionally supported by the CCIS TFW Community Support Program.

## VI. Outcome Assessment

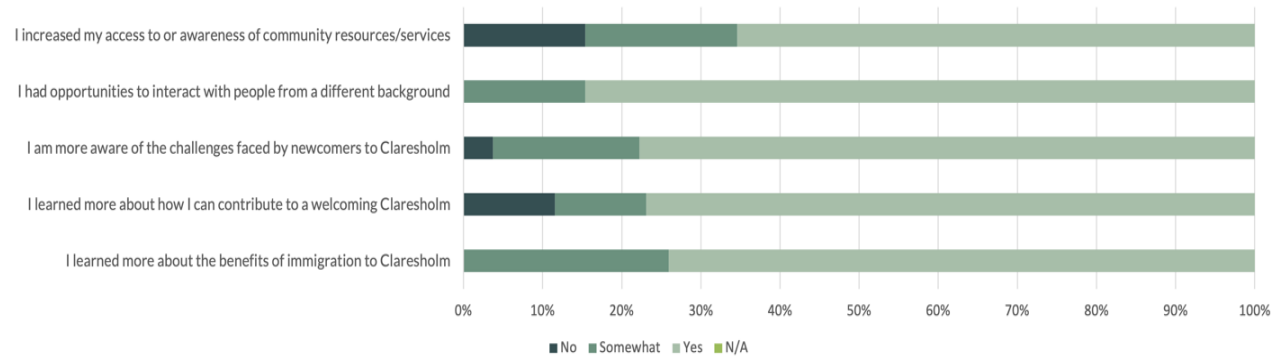
The overall sentiment of interviewees, Committee Members, and survey participants was that the project was successful in meeting its intended aims, in creating momentum for ongoing work, and in direct outcomes from the activities completed. While there are mixed levels of awareness and openness to the project in the community, there is overall agreement that, on the whole, a shift toward a more amenable environment can be observed. Newcomers were better supported, community members were made more aware, key champions were identified, various levels of commitment were made –

including some strong partnerships – and knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion was increased among service providers.

**Participant outcomes:** Survey participants were asked to rate their agreement with a series of outcome statements. 82% said ‘yes’ they had opportunities to interact with people from a different background, 78% are more aware of the challenges faced by newcomers to Claresholm, and 74% learned more about the benefits of immigration to Claresholm and/or how they can contribute to a more welcoming community. This data suggests that the initiative was effective, through various forms of engagement, in not only raising awareness of immigrant communities and the resettlement process, but led to greater cross-cultural connections, and ideas of how to personally contribute to a welcoming community.

“I believe that [SILP] has been well organized and offered to our community exceptionally well”  
-survey respondent

**Based on your experience/involvement, please rate your agreement with the following:**




Strengths:

Staff and stakeholders considered the SILP to be well-planned and well-executed. With the support of an immigrant-serving agency and municipal buy-in, the project was able to move forward efficiently despite health restrictions that limited in-person and/or group activities. Several facilitating factors have been attributed to the success of the project:

- Overall, the project was successful in **gaining buy-in from a variety of stakeholders**, including the local Public Library, the School system, the Chamber of Commerce, FCSS, and the Economic Development Office at the Town of Claresholm. The project team was strategic in targeting major systems while also investing in creating connections with community-based organizations, faith groups, residents, and

business owners. This diverse lens on potential supporters demonstrated a truly **community-wide approach**.

- A strength of the project is that it was realistic in assessing and **investing in awareness raising and capacity building activities** as important first-steps to making long-term and sustained shifts toward a more welcoming community. Ideas around immigration and resettlement are relatively new to the community, which has a low number of immigrant residents as compared to other municipalities across the province. Staff were attentive to various levels of readiness and invested time in relationship building and the provision of accurate information. Potential partners were informed of various ways to be involved in the project now or in the future.
- A **committed Committee** and supportive community members will help sustain the initiative in the long term. The project was successful in identifying and garnering the support of key champions who will continue to ground the work in lived experience and localized needs and opportunities.
- **Leadership from an immigrant-serving agency (CCIS)** contributed to a strong foundation by orienting staff to the project and content-area, helping to troubleshoot challenges and maintain boundaries, and providing content and facilitation for Diversity Training sessions. A community-focused project like this can be difficult to comprehend as it shifts thinking of resettlement to a systems and community level, rather than focusing only on the knowledge and capacity of the individual newcomer or into the domain of specialized settlement services. This project was very effective in grasping that fundamental concept and maintaining role boundaries between this and the various other immigration-related initiatives developing in the community. The project team was successful in **maintaining a systems and community-level focus**, with direct settlement service available as needed.
- **Partnership with Economic Development Office** from the outset was a mutually beneficial collaboration that supported local legitimacy and municipal buy-in; the involvement of the Economic Development Office to-date will support a smooth transition as the next contract holder.



“It’s a great project to help newcomers, I am happy to be involved.”

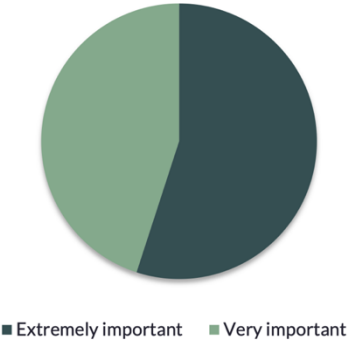
-survey respondent

- The team developed **positive relationships with local press**, facilitating extensive coverage of the initiative including profiles of Committee members. Positive media coverage is an identified promising practice toward a Welcoming Community and is generally effective in reaching a broad catchment of the community. The SILP was strategic in generating coverage for events and activities as well as profiling newcomers in the community.
- Notable **momentum for ongoing work** has been established. The project has clearly been integrated into the community at a time where there is readiness and a need for the work. While ongoing outreach and awareness raising is a key opportunity, significant gains were made in terms of generating support and identifying champions for the project. The combination of events, information sessions, training, street-front office, and relationship building allowed the project make itself well known throughout various levels of the community in a short time.

Opportunities:

There is a clear interest in continuing the SILP initiative, based on the data gathered during the evaluation process. 55% of survey respondents said it is “extremely important” to continue to the project, with the remaining 45% saying “very important” (with none choosing somewhat important, not so important, or not important). To follow are some of the key opportunities identified by stakeholders:

**Importance of Welcoming Claresholm SILP**



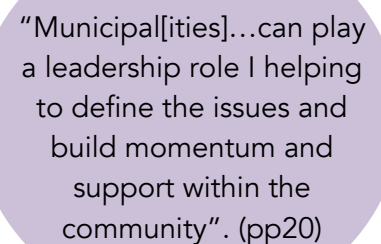
**Retention focus:** Survey respondents identified that *retaining* newcomers as long-term residents is the most important opportunity for the SILP, followed by creating opportunities for newcomers/immigrants to participate in civic life. This aligns with the overarching goal of the project to-date, demonstrating effective communication of the project purpose and agreement with that overarching mission. A number of interviewees/survey respondents specifically identified a need to increase the engagement and participation of newcomers/immigrants in civic decision-making: whether as voters, candidates, council members, or engaged citizens.

**Public-facing events and activities:** Several survey responses centered around the June multicultural event “Spread the World”, with many suggesting more such events and/or a refined and expanded version of the 2021 event. While considered impactful there was interest in greater depth of information and opportunities to engage in deeper discussions. Moving forward the project can consider maintaining a signature event while being mindful to also integrate principles of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion into other community events and projects.

**Ongoing investment in relationship-building:** Interviewees were consistent in identifying that the work is in its early stages and ongoing. Immediate efforts should remain focused on a combination of broad-based and targeted relationship building, awareness raising, and education activities. This includes strengthening and formalizing relationships and partnerships already established as well as broadening the scope of outreach. However, there are other systems and individual persons that may be harder to engage in meaningful ways: personal values, system bureaucracy, myths about immigrants, and embedded power structures are all potential challenges that will require flexibility and persistence to meaningfully overcome.

**Provision of information and myth-busting:** As the SILP continues, staff emphasized the opportunity for ongoing activities focused on awareness-building and correcting inaccurate perceptions. While several partners, volunteers, and supporters have been solidified, ongoing outreach is required to continue getting up-to-date and accurate information into the community. Because the project is not focused on direct supports but the broader community, the team should be mindful to ensure that the public understand that the SILP is not a resettlement service but a whole-community imperative that they should each be able to see themselves a part of. At the same time, the project may be an entry point for newcomers to settlement services.

**Local leadership:** The renewed iteration of the project will be held by the Economic Development Office at the Town of Claresholm. This presents an opportunity to integrate the values and competencies of a Welcoming Community throughout the municipal structure, by advancing for example, mandatory training programs, civic engagement initiatives, and diversity and inclusion policies. An additional strength of this shift to the Town as the contract holder is that the project will be locally



“Municipal[ities]...can play a leadership role in helping to define the issues and build momentum and support within the community”. (pp20)

owned. This may have the positive impact of lending legitimacy to the work, encouraging local buy-in, and supporting partnership-building in general and with major systems in particular.

**Evaluation & Research:** Ongoing research activities aimed at developing a local knowledge base will support the SILP to develop and prioritize targeted, evidence-informed activities. Tools like [AUMA's \(2014\) Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Toolkit](#) can help Claresholm further understand their levels of inclusivity. An asset map, community needs assessment, or systematized approach to capturing the experiences of newcomers can all support the development of a local evidence base. By capturing a baseline and committing to ongoing data gathering the community can take a Results Based Accountability approach to the work, demonstrating a measurable commitment to change.

Engaging in evaluative research, such as a developmental evaluation approach, may be helpful to the SILP as it continues to test, assess, and refine different activities and approaches. A developmental evaluation approach supports an overall impact focus while creating a system of ongoing feedback which is particularly effective for emergent work or shifting environmental conditions. As this is still a new project, engaging diverse stakeholders at differing levels of readiness, and shifting to new leadership, this presents an excellent opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of novel and established practices as they are applied locally. As a system of supports is emerging in Claresholm there may be additional opportunities to report on certain metrics collectively and/or to co-invest in population level research to assess long-term impacts.

**Evidence-based decision-making:** External research such as [\*Working With Immigrants for Rural Areas: Policy and program implications for rural areas\* \(2017\)](#), [\*Characteristics of a Welcoming Community\* \(2010\)](#), ["What is a Welcoming and Inclusive Community" \(2017\)](#), ["Attracting and Retaining Immigrants: A toolbox of ideas for smaller centres" \(2007\)](#), [\*Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario\* \(2011\)](#), and AUMA's ["Strategies for Small Communities"](#) can provide additional evidence to support the SILP. Recommendations and promising practices outlined in this research mirror much of what has already been embedded in the SILP including: involving newcomers as key players, encouraging employment opportunities, attracting media coverage, availability of direct settlement support, using research-based decision making, focusing on capacity building, and flexibility and collaboration.

## VII. Conclusion

Based on the original intentions of the initiative and promising practices and common steps of other forms of comparable initiatives, the Welcoming Claresholm SILP made significant progress toward and created momentum for a welcoming and inclusive community. The SILP was well-executed, progressed as planned, and had a generally positive response from the community. Staff were flexible, adaptable, motivated, and committed: they reached out broadly and garnered notable support, press coverage, and momentum for the project while establishing two major legacy pieces that will bridge to the next phase of the project. The project was overall successful in raising awareness among diverse stakeholders, garnering support, and creating opportunities for cross-cultural connections.

The work also made clear that sustained and broader engagement, awareness-raising, education, and skill building activities are required to foster a truly coordinated, inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environment for newcomers when they arrive to Claresholm and as they move through the re-settlement and integration process. Staff, Committee members, and project participants have identified key next steps as: research into newcomer experiences and potential service gaps to build a more fulsome evidence base from which to build strategies and initiatives; working with the Town of Claresholm, the Economic Development Office, and the Welcoming Committee to develop a formal action plan; and continued outreach and training. In general participants are also keen to see more cultural events that raise awareness in the broader community and create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

Key strengths of year one of the SILP were: the central role of an immigrant-serving agency, with notable capacity, in guiding the vision and boundaries of the project; a strong focus on awareness-building and sensitivity to community readiness; a core partnership with the municipality to foster buy-in and participation from local leadership; and the establishment of a guiding Committee with the intentional recruitment of newcomer members. Additionally, the project aims were enhanced through coordination with other local initiatives also supporting the attraction and retention of newcomers.

The shift (July 1, 2021) to leadership from the Economic Development Office of the Town of Claresholm presents a new opportunity in that the project will now be 'held' by a local organization and be well-positioned for systems-level impacts. At the same time, it will

be entering a period of change as it comes under new leadership, with different forms of knowledge and expertise, and new organizational conditions. The ongoing relationship with CCIS and Willow Creek Immigrant Services will continue to provide content-expertise and guidance as needed, in addition to having established a strong foundation for the continued work. The project to-date has generated strong momentum and value among various stakeholders in the community and is likely to continue seeing growth in terms of scale, scope, and impact through a continued commitment to active stakeholder and community engagement and localized, evidence-informed decision making.



## References

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<sup>ii</sup> *Economic Profile Series: Claresholm, Alberta*. 2019. Immigration Matters Series, Government of Canada,. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/immigration-matters/economicprofile-claresholm-alberta-en-final.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> *Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario (CIRRO): Helping rural communities attract newcomers*. 2011. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs. Retrieved from: <http://p2pcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Community-Immigrant-Retention-in-Rural-Ontario.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> *Attracting and Retaining Immigrants: A Toolbox of ideas for smaller centres*. 2007. National Working Group on Smaller Centre Strategies. (NWGSCS). Retrieved from: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/attracting-and-retaining-immigrants-toolbox.pdf>

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