



# Faith & Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants & Canada up for Success

London Case Study Report  
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*Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants and Canada up for Success* is a research partnership intended to explore partnerships between faith-based and government-funded settlement organizations in Ontario. This two-year project is led by the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR) and funded by the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**. More information can be found at:

[www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Faith & Settlement Partnerships](http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca/Page/View/Faith%20&%20Settlement%20Partnerships)

The project used multiple methods. Case studies were held within the local study sites. Other methods included a literature review and a cross-site organizational survey. Reports were written for each method.

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## Context

### Immigration in London

London is situated in Southwestern Ontario and stands as the sixth largest city in the province with a population of 494,000, as reported by Statistics Canada in 2016. This demonstrates a population growth of 4.6% over the last year; lagging behind the national growth rate by 0.4% (Statistics Canada, 2016).

As of 2011, the recorded immigrant population in London was 26,585, accounting for 21.2% of the total population at the time. The largest influx of immigrants in the city arrived between 2001 and 2011, with 21,210 new immigrants arriving in London. Historically, the three largest sources of immigrants have been the United Kingdom, Poland, and Columbia. Other source countries include, in order of the size of representation: United States, Portugal, China, India, Netherlands, South Korea, and Italy. Among recent arrivals, the top ten countries of birth for immigrants are: Columbia, China, United States, South Korea, Iraq, India, United Kingdom, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan (Statistics Canada, 2013). However, the demographic of immigrant population in London is changing with the influx of refugees arriving since 2011.

Regarding the ethnic origin of immigrant populations in London, approximately 16% identified as a visible minority, one third of who identified as Latin American and Arabic. In contrast, 73% of London's population reported having European origins, mostly English, while only 26% identified as having Canadian origins. People in London speak around 100 different languages, according to the 2011 Census, with the top three non-official languages spoken at home being Spanish (13,045), Arabic (10,145), and Polish (6,315). Two thirds of Londoners identify as Christian and one in twenty identify as Muslim, while one third report having no religious affiliation/connection (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Since 2011, the ongoing Syrian conflict led to a displacement of approximately 6.3 million internally displaced persons. In 2016, the Canadian government developed a plan to take in and resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees (Immigration London & Middlesex County, 2017). Since 2015, 35,147 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada, and according to a 2015 Statistics Canada report, London has welcomed the fourth-highest refugees for capita in the country and third-highest total number of Syrians in Ontario (Friesen, 2017). The two ways in which they are able to be resettled are through government and private sponsorship. Ontario in particular is investing 10.5 million dollars over the course of two years to help resettle and support refugees; 1.8 million dollars alone will be allocated to various organizations that are responsible for refugee support (Government of Ontario, 2016).

### A Faith and Settlement Partnership in London

The two organizations whose partnership is being explored under this case study are the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) and the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (MRCSSI). CCLC is a government funded settlement agency, while the latter is a culturally-based community service agency.

London's primary government-funded settlement agency, the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC), has been operating since 1968 with a vision to build a more welcoming and just community where newcomers can succeed. Its mission is to be a community organization that exists to provide settlement services and support to newcomers while promoting intercultural awareness and understanding.

The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (MRCSSI) is an anti-violence and social service agency whose mission is to provide culturally integrative services that build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to overcome challenges that could impact their integration process. These services aim to manage conflict and ensure the safety and well-being of this population. The centre is not a faith-based organization; however, it does recognize faith, among other aspects, as playing a key role in the integration process of individuals and families.

## Methodology

Qualitative methods of individual interviews and focus group were employed to collect data. Semi-structured interview questions were developed to guide the interviews and 10 in-depth qualitative interviews were completed. The core questions on the interview guide consisted of three focus areas: (1) context and vision; (2) practice and structure; (3) future processes. Furthermore, the participants were asked several demographic questions for group comparison purposes.

Purposive sampling (Rubin & Babie, 2011) was employed to recruit research participants for the interviews, based on the required criteria that those individuals were members of specific departments from each of the organizations that were involved in the partnership activities. The 10 participants were chosen from two organizations in order to collect data: the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (n=4) as the faith-valuing organization and the Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) (n=6) as the primary government-funded settlement agency. Individual interviews were conducted (N=10) with front-line workers (n=7), managers (n=2), and a director (n=1). The aim was to have representation from both organizations with different levels of staff from each, providing the case study with diverse insights to the partnership.

A letter of invitation to introduce the project was sent to the Executive Directors of the organizations. The project was introduced and specific department managers were made available as points of connection for further recruitment. With the assistance of the department managers, an email invitation was circulated within specific departments in both organizations that were involved in the partnership activities. Interested participants were asked to contact the research assistant directly for further information or for scheduling an interview. The duration of each interview was approximately 1.5 hours and all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Thematic analysis was used to review and synthesize the interview data. First, the text from each interview was colour-coded to easily identify the source. Next, responses to a given guiding question were combined into one section. Each of the responses for a given question was reviewed and compared with all of the other responses across the interviews. These were then combined according to similar themes or categories. Each of these themes was given a descriptive label to capture the content of the

statements. In some instances, themes that were similar in concept were combined and a larger theme was created.

In addition to the interviews, one focus group was conducted to validate the themes. Once again purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants (N=6) where only front line workers (n=3) from each organization were selected for the focus group. Light snacks and coffee were provided at the focus group and MRCCSI provided the space for the focus group. An ice-breaker, “Two Truths and a Lie,” was employed at the beginning of the focus group to get the participants comfortable and talking. Once the themes were introduced to the group, the participants were asked to reflect upon each theme and provide comments as well as final feedback to ensure that the research team was accurately interpreting the findings.

## Description of the Study Participants

All 10 interview participants returned a completed demographic survey to the interviewer. Seventy percent of the participants (n=7) were between the age of 41-60. Eighty percent (n=8) were female and 20% were male (n=2). Thirty percent of the participants were at the management level and 70% of the participants were front line staff. The list of occupations for participants included: case managers (n=4), social workers (n=2), department managers (n=2), one clinical director (n=1) and a settlement worker in schools (n=1). Forty percent of the participants (n=4) had fewer than 5 years of experience working in their current field of practice, and 30% of the participants (n=3) had over 25 years of experience in their current field of practice. All the participants were asked if they had worked with government-funded settlement or faith-based organizations prior to the current partnership and for how long. All but one participant indicated that they had prior experience working with a similar type of organization.

Role of Participants	n	%
<b>Front Line Staff</b>	7	70
<b>Management Staff</b>	3	30

Length of time in current field of practice	n	%
<b>One to five years</b>	4	40
<b>Five to ten years</b>	3	30
<b>More than Twenty-five years</b>	3	30

## Findings and Discussion:

Vision: To what extent are faith/settlement partnerships viewed positively?

### **Collaboration is key to addressing and responding to gaps in service**

The partnership between Cross Cultural Learner Centre and the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (MRCSSI) was formed to address the gaps of support and services delivery for immigrant/refugee families impacted by war, trauma, and/or family violence. Gaps in services for immigrant and refugee families exist for various reasons, but individual interview participants described how the partnership has addressed this gap in services. Immigrants and refugees coming from various parts of the world have diverse needs in their settlement process. The different levels of needs of these populations can be provided by either organization. Those that the government-funded settlement agency can provide are settlement needs while MRCSSI has been able to provide accessibility to faith supports and culturally integrative counselling. The partnership became imperative in addressing the gap that existed in the services being offered.

One participant emphasized the importance of the spiritual and cultural factors in the lives of the population the organizations collectively serve.

*“The older that I get, the more I realize that hope is what gets people going forward, and hope usually comes from people’s spiritual beliefs. I can’t reiterate enough how important the spiritual/cultural piece is, especially the spiritual piece. I mean, in terms of the cultural piece, I think we do understand that. We have culturally-competent trainings, but not spiritual-competent trainings. It is a bit scary. People don’t want to talk about death, taxes, or religion.”* (03 participant)

One focus group participant reinforced the theme by highlighting the importance of partnership in addressing service gaps as well as in identifying service gaps.

*“I agree with the statement that collaboration is helping in addressing the gap; also collaborations help identify gaps in the system”* (06 participant)

Hence, the needs of clients and the aim of providing holistic responses and services were the underlying motivations behind identifying gaps in services. Both organizations want to provide the best services that result in positive outcomes for the population it serves. The partnership is viewed as a mechanism to provide quality holistic services and responses.

### **The need for culturally and spiritually meaningful services and responses**

A key motivator for the partnership was the need for culturally meaningful responses and services. Newcomer, immigrant and refugee families face complex challenges in their journeys to integrate into Canadian society in addition to the existing barriers to accessing services. The partnership provided an opportunity for an alternative approach in responding to the challenges facing these populations by providing culturally and spiritually appropriate services and responses. These services and responses took

into account the client's past experiences as well as their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Faith services are used in the integration process since settlement and migration brings a great deal of stressors into the lives of newcomer, immigrant and refugee families. Hence, faith was used to mitigate these stressors. The cultural and faith-valuing organization provided an alternative approach to respond to the challenges facing these populations by providing culturally integrative responses (Baobaid & Ashbourne, 2017). One government-funded settlement agency participant highlighted the importance of culturally meaningful responses

*"If the client is Muslim then we refer to them (MRCSSI) because of their cultural sensitivity and customs awareness. Clients are more comfortable because of their cultural sensitivity relating to issues of trauma, integration, domestic violence and experiences of war."* (O1 participant)

During the focus group, another participant highlighted how the partnership provides not only access to faith support but to culturally meaningful services as well:

*"Middle Eastern clients get referred to them based on sharing a cultural background, even if their religion may differ."*

The culturally meaningful responses allow for a better understanding of the needs of the population both organizations are serving and the ability to respond to these complex needs of families at an early stage of settlement. One interview participant highlighted the importance of access to families at an early stage of arrival:

*"By starting to work with the families from the beginning (at point of arrival) we would be able to prevent violence."* (O5 participant)

## Structure: What type of partnerships presently exist and how could they be improved?

### **The positive impact of partnership on client's integration, services, and service delivery**

The partnership has had a positive impact on client integration, services, and service delivery provided by both partnering organizations. Each partner has been able to increase knowledge and awareness of clients' issues, as well as recognizing how best to access appropriate services and responses. The partnership resulted in a positive impact on client integration and well-being. Furthermore, the benefits of this partnership on the service delivery have included an enhanced knowledge of the cultural context and needs of newcomer immigrant and refugee families and have increased the engagement and capacity of staff to respond to the complex needs of families in the early stages of family conflict.

The impact of partnership on clients was stated by one participant as:

*"Just that they have been heard and understood. That their way of thinking, religious practices aren't dismissed, but seen as very important and vital for their health. I think the spiritual health is very important in addition to the physical and emotional health because it is what provides hope and hope is what keeps you going."* (O3 participant)

Another participant highlighted the potentially negative effect on clients and services if the partnership did not exist:

*“We would be much more having to deal with the CAS and police on our own and that would detrimental to the clients which would be detrimental to the organization because we are here for clients. It would have a big long-term impact on them, especially if they come new to Canada and they get separated from the beginning of their time in here.” (01 participant)*

Another participant commented on the impact the partnership had in terms of the services they provide, saying it helped their organization in *“gaining strength and credibility for our services.”* (06 participant). Finally, a participant highlighted the significance this partnership provides through its ability to identify and work with risk factors faced by families:

*“We need somebody with the skills and experience to work with this group either from intervention, counselling perspectives and even before it even happens. We want to catch it before it escalates.”* (07 participant)

Focus group participants validated this theme and emphasized how the partnership was initiated and has expanded:

*“In the beginning the focus was on family unit and the constant struggle of Muslim families with the system, from there it expanded.”* (03 participant)

### **Funding and lack of resources identified as a challenge**

The reality for cultural community organizations is that funding is always hard to obtain and resources are often stretched. Funding affects services, the population being served, and the scope of work the organization intends to do. The participants acknowledge the importance of partnership and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of specific newcomer immigrant and refugee families; however, the lack of resources has had an impact on their service delivery. Central to the issue has been the timing and wait list for receiving vital services and responses. In addition, participants indicated that if funding and resources were not an issue, the service provided by the MRCSSI should be expanded to other populations that are not of the same faith background but share cultural values and norms. Participants pointed to successful cases where the partnership had a positive impact on individuals and families that were of diverse faith backgrounds. Despite having the cultural expertise and proven record of service, MRCSSI is unable to expand its services to larger demographics due to a lack of resources and funding.

One participant highlighted the potential reach of the organization if funding was increased:

*“I think you would get at more people using the service because right now, there are only the Muslims using the service and there are lot of other faith groups that are not as organized as MRCSSI.”* (02 participant)

Another participant acknowledged the reality of a lack of resources and its impact on the services:

*“At this point, our case load has increased significantly so the quality and quantity (of service) is not there. And maybe that’s part of becoming a more mainstream service organization. But if you put in the time, you get the results, you support appropriately and you engage well. Those families need a significant amount of intervention and help and there is a significant amount of time needed to help the service providers understand what is required.” (08 participant)*

Focus group participants discussed the issue of wait lists in relation to funding, and one participant acknowledged that “there is a lack of funding influencing the wait lists”.

Another re-affirmed the theme but indicated the service levels have improved after a slowdown in the influx of Syrian newcomers:

*“The issue of response time is already solving itself as the case load is going down since the influx of Syrians is handled; at the peak of the influx response time was an issue though” (01 participant)*

## Process: How can effective partnerships be better facilitated?

### Trusting relationship and constant communication

Since partnerships are complex and collaborations occur at multiple levels, trust becomes an important foundation for the success of the partnership. The complexity of partnership and the need for continuing collaboration need strong levels of trust in order to be successful. Strong relationships are at the heart of this successful partnership, even as participants acknowledge the lengthy and sometimes challenging course of developing them. Central to the principle of trust is constant communication and transparency. The needs of the population are diverse and the partnerships are complex, so constant communication and continuing collaboration become imperative. The sensitive nature of the cases, confidentiality, and the buy-in on the response strategies from partners require a high level of trust between the relationships established. As with most relationships, developing trust between MRCSSI and CCLC has taken time. It started and has continued with constant communication, engagement in dialogue, and the incorporation of delivering supports and services together. In order to achieve and maintain this trust, open and constant communication between partners became essential.

One interview participant highlighted the importance of trust and communication in relation to her role:

*“Settlement workers were able to share with us lot of information about the family that we didn’t know from the client themselves. It is important to have time to provide information about the client that we wouldn’t otherwise know. (05 participant)*

Another participant described the style of communication:

*“(CCLC) is a very cooperative and open organization. The staff is very open, the administration is very open to us... There is open communication between the Executive Directors and the*

*managers here at CCLC and we work in situations on an individual basis. We do have regular contact with them. We have case conferences on a monthly basis.” (08 participant)*

Yet another participant shared the importance of constant communication within the partnership:

*“Communication is always an important aspect and an important challenge to open doors because within our organizations, we work within our mandates and within our bylaws and when you work with settlement organizations, you don’t only work within their mandates, you work within a big structural system. So, communication is always a key factor to open doors, a key factor where people sit and communicate, find solutions together, think together and create a more inclusive atmosphere to work.” (09 participant)*

For trusting relationships to develop in the partnership over time, the partnering organizations and the staff involved in the partnership had to consistently exhibit openness and honesty at all times. They listened to each other and were able to speak frankly about issues that affect the clients, services and the service delivery. When individuals from partnering organizations felt that their concerns were heard and their clients’ needs were addressed by the staff of partnering organizations, the trust continued to develop. This played and continues to play an important role in the overall success of the partnership. Partners are more likely to get involved and continue to stay involved in the partnership when their clients’ needs are addressed.

An interview participant showcased the close and trusting nature of the relationship of the partnership:

*“I know that I am very close with some of my board members like your previous chair. She and I are very close. We always had certain discussions as to what we can do to do better.” (07 participant)*

Another participant emphasized the role trust plays in everyday work within the partnership:

*“When partnering with them, there is more accountability between the two organizations. When you do a referral, you could just do a follow-up but it stops there. Here, you are sharing the same clients and want to get the feedback back and forth. The key between collaboration and community partnership is more transparency than if they just the respectability in terms of referrals.” (07 participant)*

Lastly, a participant highlighted their trust in the partnership when asked about what value, if any, do they see in the partnership by stating:

*“In all honesty, I can sleep well at night knowing the services are provided.” (07 participant)*

Focus group participants also discussed this theme and one participant indicated the importance of constant communication:

*“Communication between managers of CCLC/MRCSSI is working very well. In challenging situations workers report to managers right away and they meet immediately” (06 participant)*

## Follow-up partnership evaluation and integrating community of practice strategies

In order for this partnership to continue to be successful, the participants made several suggestions. They pointed out that periodically assessing the effectiveness of their joint programs and processes is imperative to the partnership's success. Since organizations have their specific mandates and goals, so they each have their internal evaluation but participants mentioned the need to conduct an evaluation framework that seeks to measure collectively how the partnership is doing in terms of the kind of impact each seeks to accomplish. Additionally, gathering information from all partners and incorporating the findings into decision-making is important. Furthermore, the need to devote time and resources to connect and recognizing the hard work that goes into partnership efforts can be beneficial. This provides opportunities for partners to connect and join together in celebrating their accomplishments and discussing areas for improvement. Interview participants acknowledged that despite working closely together, there has been limited opportunity to connect and celebrate the partnership. Furthermore, participants acknowledge that research initiatives like this can play a vital role in bringing these individuals together and providing opportunities for reflection.

An interview participant emphasized the importance of evaluation in maintaining partnerships:

*"The partnership can be maintained by assessing and evaluating our objectives and our outcomes"* (08 participant)

Another interview participant mentioned evaluation:

*"Conduct outcome evaluations not only in numbers but in quality of the cooperation"* (06 participant)

During the focus group one participant reinforced the theme by indicating the importance of evaluation and meetings:

*"We have to be more intentional instead of thinking the partnerships work on their own; maybe quarterly meetings would be useful for that"* (05 participant)

Participants discussed the idea of integrating community of practice strategies. At the core of these strategies would be the idea of bringing partners together to strengthen relationships, build opportunities to understand the work each partner is doing, and identifying opportunities for improved collaboration and partnerships. The ultimate goal of getting together and having these conversations would be strengthening and improving the work that is being done collectively.

An interview participant highlighted the need for more opportunities to connect and reflect on the partnerships:

*"Maybe have some sort of gathering or workshop to highlight the importance of the relationship. I don't think we ever said that to each other. This is just a new thought that came up now. We take each other for granted, but let's acknowledge and celebrate our relationship that makes us stronger and able to help clients more."* (03 participant)

## Discussion & Implications

Faith is an important factor in the work being done in the CCLC/MCRSSI partnership because it plays a key role in the adjustment process for newcomers within their new home. Faith plays an important role in the lives of people who experience any type of crisis or when they are at any transition point in their lives. These crises can include the migration journey, family crisis, separation, etc. The migration experience can also impact the dynamics within families, whether strengthening or breaking down relationships, and faith can serve as a protective factor in these situations. As a protective factor, faith can be used to overcome various challenges that have psychological and emotional impacts on families.

Due to the fact that faith is essential for the integration of newcomers, faith-based organizations and faith leaders must be included as part of settlement services and responses. This can be done by inviting them to develop their own responses and services for newcomers, especially those who are affiliated with and well connected to their congregations.

MRCSSI's concept of culturally integrative responses is a model that understands the role of faith in the integration process along with other key aspects, including the cultural and migration experience. The culturally integrative response is about integrating existing mainstream settlement services within a cultural context. Essentially, it's about using the best practices of services available and making it more culturally meaningful. "Culture" can have a variety of meanings: it can include norms, values and customs, and be a determinant in what is appropriate or inappropriate. With this understanding, the services can become tailored in a culturally sensitive way to the needs of the population being served.

In addition, it is important to highlight the type of partnership that can be successful by looking at the content of the partnership between CCLC and MRCCSI. As discussed previously, CCLC is an immigrant/newcomer serving organization with the mandate of settlement while MRCSSI is anti-violence and social service cultural community organization that also serves mainly immigrant and newcomer from the Muslim community. However, unlike other cultural community organizations, MRCSSI partnership with CCLC is not just limited to education and raising awareness about the cultural aspects of working with newcomers. The partnership also covers various others areas including sharing clients at different levels of involvement and stages of settlement needs. The type of partnership that they have demonstrates that working with the newcomer populations does not just necessitate the hiring of people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities but also there needs to be a partnership between institutions and organizations, specifically having a cultural community organization that acts as a bridge between cultural or faith community and helps build relationships. In London, MRCSSI on one hand acts as bridge between settlement agencies and immigrants and newcomers from Muslim community but also at the same time builds bridges between settlement agencies and social service organizations including child welfare and mental health services. Hence, one of the key lessons learned from this partnership between MRCSSI and CCLC is thinking differently about working with newcomers and diverse cultural

communities. Therefore, empowering different cultural communities to establish their own organization that can work in collaboration and partnership with mainstream service providers such as settlement services instead of doing work through individuals who represent these communities will allow for a more effective and sustainable responses. In this way there can be instead a cultural community organization that can help bridge with newcomer communities and provide other services. The outcome of such a system of relationship, as this partnership has shown, are a positive impact on the population being served and the services being offered.

In summary, since settlement and migration bring about many stressors in the lives of newcomers, partnerships between CCLC and MRCSSI are imperative to offering better settlement services and supports.

## Conclusion

This single case study research shows that when cultural community organizations such as MRCSSI and government funded settlement agencies such as CCLC work together, they can be more successful in responding to the complex needs of newcomers. These partnerships are established, maintained and strengthened through trust, constant communication, and support in delivering services that are culturally meaningful. They incorporate the clients' cultural values and spiritual beliefs as part of the solution. Each member of the partnership holds important perspectives and resources that can contribute to serving individuals in a culturally integrative manner. These solutions can be achieved through mutual understanding as well as through recognition of the each organization's expertise, roles, and responsibilities within the partnership. The services are more effective when the system is better engaged through partnerships between government-funded settlement and faith-valuing organizations. This partnership acknowledges the client's cultural realities and their spiritual beliefs. In addition, constant communication is vital to the success of the partnership. Also, conducting ongoing evaluation or assessment is imperative to the success of the partnership. Finally, research initiatives like these serve an important role in highlighting the impact of faith in the integration of newcomers and evaluating the outcomes of such partnerships.

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