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Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders

Rich Janzen

Centre for Community Based Research/Renison University College, University of Waterloo

Chris Brnjas

Wilfrid Laurier University

Jim Cresswell

Ambrose University

Mark Chapman

Tyndale University College & Seminary

Title

Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders

Abstract

This article explores partnerships between faith groups and government-funded immigrant settlement services. It does so by reporting on perspectives of community stakeholders through a survey across four communities in Ontario, Canada. Survey results demonstrate that the existence, benefits and challenges of faith and settlement partnerships are recognized by settlement workers, faith leaders and other stakeholders alike. Yet the results also indicate that more could be done to strengthen partnerships so that they lead to better settlement outcomes. To this end, the article discusses five key actions: sharing stories, exploring differences, enabling a cultural shift, conducting advocacy, and formalizing partnerships.

Keywords

Immigrant settlement; community partnerships; faith and society; post-secularism; community-based research

Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders

Introduction

This paper explores partnerships between faith groups and government-funded settlement services in Canada that are designed to help immigrants and refugees settle and integrate into their new homeland. It does so at a time when government-funded professionalized settlement services are increasingly being recognized as only one component of the system of support needed by newcomers (Esses et al. 2010; Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2011; Janzen, Walton-Roberts and Ochocka 2012). For example, the Federal government has begun funding Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) in communities across Canada expecting to build comprehensive partnerships involving local organizations and institutions across public, private and non-profit sectors (CIC 2011). This growing emphasis on cross-sectoral partnerships was on display during the recent influx of Syrian refugees to Canada where many new local players emerged to partner with long-standing refugee-serving agencies (Janzen, Ochocka and English Leis, under review).

It is within this context favouring partnerships that faith groups could be viewed as potential partners for government-funded settlement organizations; a view made more pertinent given the significant role that faith groups have historically played in supporting generations of newcomers to Canada (Ley 2008). Despite this potential, there is very little known about the state of partnerships between faith groups and settlement organizations in Canadian communities, nor is there an understanding about how current players in the settlement sector view the prospects of such partnerships (Janzen et al. 2016). This article attempts to address this gap by providing insights into faith and settlement partnerships from the perspective of local stakeholders within selected communities of Ontario, Canada.

The article begins with a brief review of the literature related to the socio-political context of faith and settlement partnerships in Canada, highlighting reasons for their existence and their challenges. We then introduce a research project which attempted to shed light on these types of partnerships while featuring one of the project's methods (an online survey of local practitioners) that was to gain ground-level perspectives. Next, survey findings are presented according to the study's social systems framework related to the vision, structures, and processes of faith and settlement partnerships. The article ends by discussing both the contributions of survey findings to the literature and their implication for future practice.

Literature Review

Newcomers to Canada tend to be more religious than Canadian-born citizens. Only 19% of recent immigrants claim no religious affiliation compared to 24% of other Canadians (Statistics Canada 2011). At the same time, the religious diversity of immigrants is increasing. While Christianity remains the primary religious affiliation (47% of recent immigrants), affiliation with other world religions is growing rapidly most notably Muslim (17% of recent immigrants), Hinduism (7%), and Sikhism (5%) (Statistics Canada 2011).

Canadians can expect this trend in religious newcomers to continue for quite some time. Estimates show that religious populations are expected to increase globally until at least 2050, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia (Pew 2015). The bulk of countries that have continued population growth come from these regions. This means that these diverse religious countries are likely to remain major sources for immigrants coming to Canada (United Nations 2015). This global trend, combined with the Government of Canada's stated plan to increase immigration targets (IRCC 2017a), suggests that immigrants of faith coming to Canada will likely only increase in the future.

Upon arrival many immigrants of faith first look to their faith community for support and meaning (Loewen and Friesen 2009). These communities are often familiar and trusted places, acting not only as “spiritual centres” but also as “community centres” that provide newcomers with practical support (Han 2009; Reimer and Wilkinson 2010; Vaughan 2009), the opportunity to bond with others of similar faith (Han 2011; Ley 2008; Tse 2011), and the means to broaden social networks and facilitate social mobility within the broader society (Appleby 2011; Cadge et al. 2013; Handy and Greenspan 2009). Places of worship and other faith-based organizations have been found to excel at providing informal and relational supports that complement more professionalized government-funded services (Eby et al. 2011; Janzen, Chapman and Watson 2012). They also do well at providing niche services that fill gaps within the local network of support for immigrants and refugees (Reimer et al. 2016).

It is partnerships between faith groups and formal settlement services that this article explores. On the one side of the partnership equation are government-funded organizations belonging to Canada’s settlement sector which is recognized as a world leader (Shields, Drolet and Valenzuela 2016). In the 2017-18 fiscal year alone, the federal government was expected to invest over \$1.2 billion in programs providing newcomers with orientation information, language training, employment supports, and community connections (IRCC 2017b). Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the federal department that administers this funding to over 500 non-profit organizations across the country, expecting services to be delivered free of charge to all newcomers who are permanent residents. In addition, some provincial and municipal governments across the country also provide smaller amounts of funding to support immigrants and refugees. For example, in Ontario federal dollars are supplemented by provincial funding to over 90 organizations in 30 communities helping newcomers settle, get licensed and

employed in their fields, learn English and French, participate in Ontario communities and have access to language interpretation (e.g., MCI 2019). It should be noted that while refugee claimants may be eligible for certain entitlements (e.g., health care, work permits, education and social assistance), those who are not permanent residents are not necessarily eligible to receive the above-mentioned government-funded services (OCASI 2019).

On the other side of the partnership equation are the many faith groups in Canada. These are diverse entities that include places of worship, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and culturally-rooted associations and agencies. Common among them is a faith-inspired mandate and a connection to a religious constituency. These constituencies were once predominately Christian in Canada, but increasingly reflect a plurality of global religious traditions. It is difficult to estimate the number of faith groups in Canada, however, there are many. For example, it is estimated that at least 25,000 Christian congregations alone exist in Canada (Reimer and Wilkinson 2015). Statistics Canada reports 31,000 religious organizations from diverse religious traditions existing in Canada, accounting for 19% of the country's non-profit and voluntary organizations and collectively reporting \$6.8 billion in annual revenues (Hall et al. 2004). Certainly, there is ample potential in having faith groups and settlement services collaborate. To begin, faith groups represent a convenient and potentially cost-effective point of access in providing early information about the range of government-funded settlement services available within a given community (Ives and Witmer Sinha 2010). IRCC's own research has shown that existing efforts have only been moderately successful in promoting awareness of and accessibility to settlement services that it funds (CIC 2015). For their part, faith groups would benefit from partnerships with the settlement sector that better equip them to

support newcomers through professional development, service planning and evaluation (Janzen et al. 2016).

This is not to say that developing faith and settlement partnerships is a simple matter. In fact, it is quite the contrary. Historically, faith communities played a leading role in supporting immigrants, most notably by sponsoring refugees, advocating for fair refugee policy, and helping their co-religionists (Ives and Witmer Sinha 2010;; Thompson 2010). Indeed, throughout Canada's settler history, ethno-specific places of worship have been a means for newcomers to increase their social networks, building their social capital as they bond with others of similar faith and cultural background (Ley 2008; Tse 2011). Yet, in the last half century government-funded services have grown to become the primary means of supporting newcomer settlement in Canada (Tam 2003). These services were developed under the framing discourse of "functional secularism" – a discourse rooted in liberal materialism, emphasizing the separation of state from religion with a desire to be ideologically neutral (Ager and Ager 2011). The moral foundation for such a discourse was grounded in perceptions of intolerant and dominating practices of the privileged Christian establishment towards non-Christian minority groups (Seljak et al. 2008).

It is not surprising, then, that the status quo governing the relationship between secular settlement services and faith groups has often been characterized by caution. Bramadat (2014) explored challenges of this faith-secular relationship in British Columbia through a qualitative pilot study. His findings suggest that members of faith communities often prefer to remain silent about their motivations in supporting refugees while government policy-makers do not wish to hear about their religious convictions. This dynamic led Bramadat to title his paper "don't ask; don't tell" in order to highlight that religion remains awkwardly silent within the settlement sector. Furthermore, practical concerns around funding create a competitive environment

between agencies which can make it difficult to pursue collaboration while competing for resources (Ives and Witmer Sinha 2010; Mukhtar et al. 2016). Thus, there has often been an uneasy, if not suspicious, co-existence when the paths of faith-based and government-funded settlement organizations have intersected.

Yet new perspectives seem to be emerging. Since the events of 9/11, a reframing of the dominant secular discourse that has shaped cultural norms is surfacing in favour of post-secular expressions (Habermas 2003; Torpey, 2011). Indeed, some suggest that Canada and other western countries have entered into an era of “open secularism” in which matters of faith are excluded less within the public sphere, and where diverse religious traditions are invited to shape an increasingly pluralistic society (Seljak et al. 2008). If true, this new openness provides fertile ground to explore faith and settlement partnerships in policy and practice. Already we have seen emerging evidence of this new openness. Some Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) in Canada have begun to intentionally engage faith groups. A good illustration is the annual “Faith and Welcoming Communities Forum” organized by the North Toronto Immigration Partnership (2017); an event explicitly exploring the role of faith groups within the local settlement network. Faith groups themselves have signaled a new openness to innovative partnerships in support of newcomer settlement and integration (Bailey-Dick et al. 2015); this openness bolstered by the increasing numbers of newcomers in their constituency and a desire to meet their immediate settlement needs (Janzen et al. 2016). The many inter-faith partnerships that emerged in response to the recent Syrian refugee influx are striking examples (Globe and Mail Sept 11, 2015).

Despite this early openness, there is very little known about the state of faith and settlement partnerships in Canadian communities other than that formal partnerships tend to be underdeveloped (Janzen et al. 2016; Eby et al. 2011). For example, we know little about how

common they are and what those on the front-lines think about these types of partnerships. We also know little about what these partnerships look like and what value (if any) they add to the local newcomer system of support. And perhaps most importantly, we know little about what can be done to strengthen these partnerships so that they lead to positive settlement outcomes for newcomers.

The purpose of this article is to speak into this gap by reporting on the findings of an online organizational survey across four communities (Toronto, Peel, Waterloo, and London) in Ontario, Canada. Ontario is the country's largest immigrant destination, receiving roughly half of newcomers to Canada from diverse world regions, and is its "cradle of settlement" (Tolley et al. 2012: 3). The four communities were selected as they are major settlement centres in large-size (Toronto, Peel) and medium-size (Waterloo, London) communities of southern Ontario and in relatively close proximity. According to the most recent Census, the total and foreign-born populations for each community are as follows: Toronto (2,732,000 total population; 45% foreign-born), Peel (1,382,000; 51%), Waterloo (524,000; 23%), and London (494,000; 19%) (Statistics Canada 2016).

Current Study

The organizational survey was situated within a multi-party research partnership entitled: "Faith and Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants and Canada Up for Success". The overarching purpose of this research was to collaboratively investigate partnerships among faith-based and government-funded settlement organizations to determine how these partnerships can better lead to positive settlement outcomes for newcomers and ultimately benefit Canadian society. For the purposes of this project, a settlement organization was understood as being an organization whose primary mandate is to work on immigrant settlement and/or refugee

resettlement, with at least some funding coming from government sources. A faith-based organization was defined as an organization or group that has a faith-inspired mandate (which could include working with immigrants/refugees) and is connected to some kind of religious constituency. Finally, a partnership was defined as a formal or informal collaboration where the parties involved agree to work toward shared objectives through mutually agreed division of labour (Compassion Capita Fund 2011).

This larger project involved a series of research studies that adopted a community-based research approach (Janzen, Ochocka and Stobbe 2016) to empirically explore ways in which faith-based and settlement organizations currently collaborate, and could better collaborate, to improve settlement outcomes of newcomers. The project involved a network of researchers and students as well as faith and settlement leaders to promote and implement effective partnerships between faith-based and settlement organizations. That is, it was a research partnership studying the topic of partnerships. These were collaborations where the parties involved agree to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour either via formal partnerships with written agreements or via informal arrangements. Research studies completed in the first year of the research partnership included: an extensive literature review, six in-depth case-studies of faith and settlement partnerships in four Ontario sites (Toronto, Peel, Waterloo, and London), and the organizational survey on which this article is based. In the second year, researchers pursued a series of knowledge mobilization activities with the intention of informing effective faith and settlement partnerships. For example, a workshop toolkit was developed to help facilitate partnerships between faith groups and government-funded settlement organizations (Brnjac and Ferrer 2018). Details about the overall project and related reports can be found on the project webpage (Centre for Community Based Research 2018).

As one study within the partnership, the organizational survey shared the social systems theoretical framework of the overall research project. A social systems framework views the components of a social system (e.g., organizations, groups) as interconnected and interdependent, and suggests that the health of the system is dependent on developing and accessing resources that facilitate system functioning (Kelly 2006; Trickett 2009). Partnerships are emphasized because system components do not view themselves as self-contained units, but function holistically and synergistically within a dynamic and textured ecological context (Schensul 2009). Effective social systems (and partnerships within them) consider three dimensions: vision, structure and process (Foster-Fisherman and Behrens 2007; Kelly et al. 2000). Applied to the current research, the social system under investigation was the local network of settlement supports for immigrants and refugees. As such, vision refers to the motivations, values, and aspirations that provide direction for supporting immigrant settlement (*why* support). Structure refers to the settings, activities and events that help to support immigrants (*what* support looks like). Process refers to actions that enable people to implement the vision of supporting immigrants (*how* to better support). We have found this to be a useful theoretical framework in previous research exploring immigrant settlement within faith settings (e.g., Janzen, Chapman and Watson 2012; Janzen et al. 2016).

The organizational survey aimed to gain an “on-the-ground” perspective about faith and settlement partnerships in selected communities. Following the above mentioned social systems framework’s three dimensions, the survey was designed to provide insight from leaders in the local settlement sector into the project’s three main research questions: 1) To what extent are faith and settlement partnerships viewed positively? (vision); 2) What types of partnerships

presently exist and how could they be improved? (structures); and 3) How can effective partnerships be better facilitated? (processes).

The survey was created by researchers at the Centre for Community Based Research, refined by project partners, and distributed using the online software Survey Monkey. The survey began with an organizational profile, which helped to determine which sector the respondent was a part of: “settlement”, “faith”, or “other”. The survey then split into three parallel surveys, one for each sector, wherein respondents provided answers to the first and second main research questions related to partnership structures and vision. At the end of the survey, respondents filled out a final section which was uniform across the three surveys, and which answered the third main research question related to processes. In total, 25 questions were asked related to all main research questions through a combination of open and closed-ended questions.

The survey was distributed through the communication channels of the four Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) involved in the research partnership. LIPs are community-wide, multi-sectoral partnerships working to strengthen a community's capacity to welcome and integrate immigrants. The four LIPs involved with this study were: 1) London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership; 2) Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership; 3) Peel Newcomer Strategy Group; and 4) Toronto Newcomer Office. The four LIPS agreed to circulate the on-line survey link to their respective members, which included a broad range of public, private and non-profit organizations interested and active in immigrant settlement and integration. The survey was completed by one leader per organization speaking on behalf of the organization. Recruitment was different depending on the context and the community. Across all study sites, approximately 650 agencies drawn from participant organization's networks were invited to

participate. One leader in each organization was asked to fill out the survey. One limitation of our sample was that respondents were limited to those within the networks of the four LIPs, thereby drawing from organizations who were already aware of or predisposed to partnerships. Researchers also conducted a focus group with three other LIP representatives from Ontario and British Columbia to explore issues more deeply. Qualitative data from this focus group was also incorporated into this article to support the survey findings. Qualitative data was analyzed deductively based on the social systems framework described above with the descriptive survey findings summarized in a technical research report (Brnjas et al. 2017). Research partners then considered these survey findings together with findings from other study methods when developing the implications of study findings for future action as outlined in the discussion section (Brnjas 2018).

Study Findings

This section synthesizes the main findings of the organizational survey. It provides a profile of participating organizations before presenting survey findings according to the main headings of the project's research questions related to vision, structure and process. More details of descriptive survey findings can be found in the technical report posted on the project webpage (Janzen, Ochocka and English Leis 2017).

Organizational Profile

A total of 73 respondents completed the survey well-divided between settlement organizations (37%), faith-based organizations (32%), and other stakeholders (32%). Other stakeholders included respondents from family services, police services, employment services, youth programs, neighbourhood and social services, sponsorship matching agencies, the healthcare sector, student unions, school boards, and funders. Geographically, survey

respondents identified as being from London (23), Toronto (22), Peel (12), and Waterloo (10). Participating organizations were also of varying size, having 0-9 staff (31%), 10-49 staff (28%), 50-99 staff (19%), and more than 100 staff (22%).

Participating organizations received funding from multiple sources. Settlement organizations relied heavily on government funding from sources such as Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (93%), the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) (67%), and their local municipal government (56%). A majority (63%) also received funding from the United Way. For faith groups, the majority of their funding came from individual donations (83%) and religious sources (57%). There was also strong evidence of volunteer involvement in faith-based organizations. While this is not a source of funding it may reduce costs of providing services to newcomers. Meanwhile, respondents from other stakeholders received a range of funding sources that included IRCC, MCI, municipal government, individual donors, the United Way, and foundations. In summary, while not a representative sample of all organizations within the four communities, the profile of respondents suggests a diverse cross-section of opinion which provide valuable insights into community stakeholder perspectives.

Opinions about Faith and Settlement Partnerships (Vision)

Faith and settlement partnerships were generally viewed positively by participating organizations. Figure 1 shows that an overwhelming number (94%) of respondents indicated that these partnerships were viewed at least “somewhat” positively in their community, with about one-quarter of respondents (26%) indicating a “very” positive view (it should be noted that while 20 respondents did not chose to respond to this question there was even distribution of responses across the three stakeholder groups). Respondents also indicated that their Local Immigration

Partnership (LIP) seemed to value the participation of faith groups in their community's settlement planning and coordination. Overall, the greatest percentage of respondents (43%) said that members of their local LIP valued the participation of faith groups "very much", while only 4% reported "not much" or "not at all". Perhaps the clearest indicator of a positive opinion of faith and settlement partnerships came when respondents were asked to evaluate the unique contributions of faith groups. An overwhelming majority agreed "somewhat" (34%) or "strongly" (51%) that "faith groups contribute something unique to the settlement sector that no other groups bring", with only 11% disagreeing. In summary, respondents were generally positive about faith and settlement partnerships, with 92% of responses answering at least "somewhat" positively across the three questions mentioned above.

Insert Figure 1 here

This positive assessment of the value of faith and settlement partnership was undergirded by practical and strategic motivation. When respondents from both the settlement and faith sectors were asked what prompted them to work with each other, a common reason for both settlement providers (76%) and faith-groups (93%) alike was that they saw collaboration as a way to address a service gap in their community. Nearly all settlement respondents (94%) were motivated in recognition of the fact that newcomers often reach out to faith groups, presumably seeing partnerships with the faith-groups as a means of ensuring that settlement services are more readily available to newcomers. A majority (60%) of faith-based groups, on the other hand, saw settlement agencies as offering expertise that their own group or volunteers lacked. These results suggest that while there are some overlapping motivating factors (e.g., each wanting to

address service gaps), settlement and faith leaders can also be uniquely motivated when coming to the partnership table.

Existing Faith and Settlement Partnerships (Structures)

Respondents were asked to discuss partnerships that they have seen or been a part of, and to assess those partnerships. The survey revealed that 81% of participating settlement groups had worked with a faith-based group within the past five years, and that 78% of participating faith groups had worked with settlement agencies. What is more, survey responses (particularly among faith groups) were skewed toward viewing faith and settlement partnerships as being common rather than not common relative to other types of cross-sectoral partnerships in their community (see figure 2). These findings suggest that numerous partnerships structures are already in place within the participating communities, and that direct awareness and experience of these faith and settlement partnerships among respondents was quite high.

Insert Figure 2 here

Many examples of partnerships were written, indicating the diverse potential of these collaborations. For example, one representative from a faith group wrote about how their sponsored refugee family was able to attend (with other refugee families) a picnic which was organized by a large local settlement organization. They also mentioned another settlement organization hosted a supper and parent session for Arabic speaking families. However, it was the faith-based sponsorship group that provided information and ensured registration and transportation to these events. Another respondent mentioned a partnership between their settlement agency and the local Muslim Association as an “amazing bridge” for refugees as they

started to arrive in Canada. Their organization had 166 people arrive in one night and required the co-ordination and support from the Muslim Association in order to smoothly receive the high volume of refugees. Another settlement respondent described a partnership formed around an outbreak of hate crimes against a local mosque. The partnership focused on creating conversations with leaders from minority groups to show that the majority of the local community was against the hate crimes and to vocalize this opposition publicly.

There were also examples of partnership beyond supporting refugees. One representative of a settlement agency wrote that they worked together with a local Armenian Church to deliver information about how to do taxes through clinics and information sessions. Another settlement worker from Brampton wrote of a partnership with a church where they shared information about their services and a program launch for Spanish-speaking seniors. The programs were explained to congregants and announcements were made during Sunday mass. As a result, many seniors registered for the program and the church continues to refer clients for the seniors program and other settlement-related services.

There were many other examples listed, but these examples serve to demonstrate partnerships that involve organizations who each brought their specific strengths and who negotiated their respective roles in order to improve newcomer experience. Partnership activities seemed to be the most promising when partners facilitated effective communication and demonstrated mutual trust, working together to creatively solve a need for newcomers in their community. Some partnerships were formalized while others were informal partnerships depending on what was needed in a given situation.

Survey results further revealed that faith and settlement partnerships were seen to come with both benefits and challenges. When thinking about benefits for newcomers, respondents

emphasized: newcomers gaining awareness of community resources to deal with settlement issues (89% agreed), newcomers receiving appropriate information and services to address their settlement needs (80% agreed), newcomers making connections to the community and to public institutions (75% agreed), newcomers acquiring more supportive relationships with others in their community (68% agreed), and newcomers gaining knowledge of life in Canada, including laws, rights, and responsibilities (66% agreed). Leading benefits for organizations who participated in the partnership included: organizations making new community connections that were helpful to their work (84% agreed), organizations providing more programs and resources to newcomers (61% agreed), and organizations learning how to form new partnerships in the community (61% agreed). Qualitatively respondents indicated that partnerships can fill many needs including to “create a stronger community”, providing “more services for newcomers”, encouraging refugees “to be connected to their religious community”, and by “building community and relationships”.

Yet partnerships can also be challenging. Figure 3 shows that 73% of respondents who had entered into a faith and settlement partnership indicated that they experienced at least some challenges, with faith groups appearing to experience more challenges than settlement organizations. Many of the challenges articulated by respondents (whether on the settlement or faith side) seemed to revolve around the scarcity of resources. For example, one respondent noted the difficulty of “building awareness of these [settlement] services and encouraging use of these services requires settlement staffing time which is at a premium given the... continuous funding reductions”. Many other settlement agencies articulated a decrease in available resources which made it more difficult to pursue partnerships that could further drain the limited resources these agencies possess. Faith groups also acknowledged being stretched by resources, as they

“mostly rely on volunteers who have little time to attend meetings and become part of the coordination of services in the community”.

Another area of challenge, experienced primarily by settlement organizations, related to navigating religious beliefs. Respondents mentioned that working with faith groups can be difficult due to the diversity of faith expressions in both their clientele and in their faith group partners. Sometimes, a faith group can hold differing values from the settlement organizations or the newcomer clients themselves, which can create tension or even distrust in the partnership. On the other hand, faith group respondents articulated challenges arising from differences in organizational culture. As one respondent noted, “We have to move at the pace and timing of the settlement organizations and in terms of agreements made by their funder”.

Insert Figure 3 here

Future of Faith and Settlement Partnerships (Processes)

Respondents were asked to comment on the future of faith and settlement partnerships, including what would make them more likely to occur, and how they could be better encouraged as an agent of integration for newcomers. This forward thinking seemed relevant to most respondents as the majority of settlement agencies (72%) and faith groups (61%) revealed that it was “likely” or “very likely” that their group or organization would pursue a faith and settlement partnership in the future (see figure 4). As one focus group respondent mentioned, “We need to... look at ways that faith can be something that brings communities together instead of being something that tears communities apart”.

Insert Figure 4 here

When asked what would make it *more* likely for faith or settlement groups to form a new partnership with each other in the future, settlement and faith stakeholders presented slightly different views (see Table 1). Settlement agencies generally favoured identifying service gaps and immigrant motivations, whereas faith groups emphasized knowledge of the benefits of partnerships and hearing stories.

More specifically, about three quarters (75%) of settlement organizations stressed that partnerships would be more likely if they were able to address a service gap otherwise not possible due to funding/client eligibility constraints. Faith groups also indicated that this was important, but that they would like stronger evidence of the benefits of faith and settlement partnerships (71%) as well as hearing stories about other partnerships in action (65%). Both groups were looking for greater awareness of how partnerships are presently supporting newcomers (53% of settlement organizations; 59% of faith groups), as well as a greater understanding of the potential benefits and challenges of partnership (53% for both). Settlement organizations also indicated that they would like clearer understanding of their motivations for supporting newcomers, immigrants, and refugees (53%), although this was less of a concern for faith groups (29%).

Insert Table 1 here

Finally, respondents indicated a few ways in which faith and settlement partnerships could be better encouraged. The top suggestions for each group of respondents were that they

could be better encouraged if there was “better clarity of roles that faith and settlement leaders each play in partnership building” (48%), “greater recognition of the usefulness of these partnerships by government funders” (46%), and “better collaboration assessing needs and planning programs” (42%). Respondents had a wide variety of ideas for how to encourage these partnerships more, but stronger clarity of roles, recognition for funders, and more efficient collaboration were three prominent themes.

Discussion

Survey results clearly demonstrate that faith and settlement partnerships are recognized by settlement workers, faith leaders and other stakeholders alike. The findings contribute to the literature in providing community-level insights that deepen our understanding of partnerships between faith groups and government-funded settlement providers in Canada. There are four main contributions that are worth noting.

First, local stakeholders in the four communities described faith and settlement partnerships as **being common** within their community. While there have been anecdotal accounts of partnerships between faith groups and settlement agencies, past studies have suggested that these partnerships within local committees have been underdeveloped (Boli 2016; Janzen et al. 2016). The federal government’s own 2013 survey of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPS) found that the 35 LIPs across the country were indeed expanding the diversity of their membership beyond traditional settlement providers. However, ethnic/religious organizations ranked 13th out of 17 potential stakeholder groups represented across LIP memberships (CIC 2014). In contrast, the awareness about and direct experience within these types of partnerships among survey respondents was surprisingly high among both faith groups and settlement organizations. Indeed, most survey respondents viewed partnerships between faith

groups and settlement organizations as being as common as other types of cross-sectoral partnerships within their community and indicated that they would likely pursue these partnerships in the future.

Second, survey findings suggest that faith and settlement partnerships are **more varied** than previously described. Past research has typically discussed partnerships in which members of faith groups offer an informal support component within a more professionalized settlement program or initiative. Such informal support could be expressed in terms of faith groups providing social connection networks (Esses et al, 2010), English conversational circles (City of Vancouver 2016), and most frequently, refugee support (AMSSA 2016; Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic, 2011; Hogue and Hogue 2015). While informal support roles for faith groups were acknowledged, survey respondents also described many other types of partnerships where faith group involvement was more integrated into direct service provision or alongside broader community-wide initiatives. Examples of these more robust partnership activities included collaborations in holding joint community events, conducting advocacy initiatives and public awareness campaigns, implementing service orientation and referral agreements, and sharing office space.

Third, surveys findings suggest that partnerships between faith groups and settlement organizations are **more clearly valued** than previously found. Previous research on faith and settlement partnerships has been mixed about the contribution of these partnerships within the settlement sector. On the one hand, partnerships have been valued to the extent that newcomers of faith receive more timely and accurate information about settlement supports (PNSG 2016; Schnieder 2016) and are more likely to become clients of settlement organizations (Drolet & Esses 2014). On the other hand, the value of faith and settlement partnerships is questioned by

those promoting secularism in which noncooperation with religious organizations is stressed (Mooney 2014; Mulholland 2017), or who underestimate the capacity of faith-based organizations (MANSO 2016). Local stakeholders who completed the survey were less equivocal; they generally viewed faith and settlement partnerships positively and valued by their peers, and they saw faith groups as offering something unique to the settlement sector. Fuelling this perspective was a recognition among settlement organizations of the common goal they had with faith groups in supporting newcomers, and of the important role that faith groups play in many newcomers' lives. These findings support suggestions of a new "open secularism" emerging within Canada in which faith is being (re)invited into the public sphere (Seljak et al. 2008), and reinforce the shift being observed within the broader global humanitarian sector in which the role of faith is beginning to be recognized (Ager, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2015).

Fourth, despite the value placed on faith and settlement partnerships, survey respondents acknowledged that partnership **challenges exist**. Most notable were challenges related to the scarcity of resources, differences in organizational culture, and the navigation of religious beliefs, all pointing to the complexity inherent in these types of partnerships. Ferris (2011) identified that faith-based organizations themselves are nuanced and more complicated than may first appear. For example, as a potential partner faith groups may represent any of an assortment of differing religious traditions, and range in the degree to which faith matters in their day-to-day operations. This complexity highlights the importance of partners taking time to understand each other and being clear about respective roles and responsibilities (MANSO 2016). While survey respondents did not explicitly raise concerns about proselytization, they did acknowledge that partnership challenges can arise when there is uncertainty and mistrust about motivations for involvement. Although past research has found greater suspicion about, rather than actual

evidence for, overt proselytization agendas among faith-groups who support newcomers (Bramadat 2014; Ferris 2011; Reimer and Maskery 2014), our findings confirm the wisdom of being transparent in partnership motivation (Janzen et al. 2016).

In summary, our survey offers rare local stakeholder perspectives suggesting that faith and settlement partnerships in Canada are more common, varied, and valued than previously thought, yet also reinforcing the very real and significant challenges that exist in practice. How best can these challenges be addressed so that faith and settlement partnerships lead to better positive settlement outcomes for newcomers? Below we briefly discuss the implication of survey findings for future action as formulated collectively by the study's research partnership. Specifically, five actions are presented applicable to all stakeholder groups, and combined address all three requirements of social systems change (i.e., changes in vision, structure and process) (see Brnjas 2018). While drawing on the Canadian experience, we believe these actions may be of interest to other jurisdictions impacted by migration in the 21st century.

Sharing Stories

Unfortunately, relatively few stories of faith and settlement partnerships are documented. Perhaps the most immediate action to promote effective faith and settlement partnerships is to document and share stories about partnerships that are already happening. Stories hold the potential to cast vision and to inform action as they provide collective identity, instruction and inspiration to those wishing to make transformative community change (Janzen 2011; Rappaport, 1995). Our literature review identified limited examples in either academic or grey literature. However, our research made us aware of several stories that highlight the value of partnerships. For example, a Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) in Mission, BC that engaged with local faith-based groups to welcome 24 refugees and permanent residents into the community. The

LIP was able to successfully leverage faith communities and the passion of their residents to successfully support newcomers (AMSSA, 2016). In another example, the Canadian government partnered with the Baha'i community to develop a program geared towards increasing the number of Baha'i newcomers in Canada. The program facilitated networks within the community where newcomers were connected and given guidance by Baha'i members in Canada. The program helped to speed up integration into Canadian society and increased overall community involvement.

Our literature review also indicated that in the absence of settlement agency involvement, faith groups from different traditions are willing to partner with each other (see Globe and Mail 2015). In the absence of accessible settlement partnerships, faith groups seem willing to partner with each other in order to help settle refugees and newcomers. The exchange of stories would be helpful to stimulate awareness of the potential of these types of partnerships and to mitigate barriers such as concerns about divergent values. This sharing could be done by practitioners writing reports about their on-the-ground experiences or through academic research. The stories that are disseminated would provide more opportunities for shared learning and knowledge to create stronger partnerships in the future.

Exploring Differences

Faith groups and settlement organizations have different motivations, needs, and questions about partnership that beg for a better understanding of each other to be able to determine how best to develop partnerships and creatively bridge service gaps. According to our survey, settlement organizations would more likely pursue partnerships if they felt they were able to address a service gap otherwise not possible. Creativity in addressing service gaps through partnerships is certainly in line with the recent policy push for more innovations in immigrant

service delivery in Canada (IRCC 2017c; cf. Janzen, Ochocka and English Lies under review). To address expressed concerns about partnership – e.g. concerns about proselytizing- settlement agencies need to clearly see how partnerships presently support newcomers, understand the potential benefits and challenges of partnerships, and possess a clearer understanding as to the motivations of faith groups in supporting newcomers. For faith groups, these themes were important, but most important to them was seeing stronger evidence of the benefits of faith and settlement partnerships and hearing more stories about other partnerships in action. Sharing stories, producing evidence, and gaining more clarity of the motivations of faith and settlement groups who support refugees can create a higher level of trust that will help these partnerships to flourish.

Enabling a Culture Shift

In order for faith and settlement partnerships to be more fully utilized in Canadian society, a culture shift is needed that enables movement from treating government services and faith groups as two independent entities that never interact with each other to seeing the benefits which both parties offer in improving the integration of newcomers to Canada. This is a shift already in motion, as 81% of settlement respondents indicated they had worked with a faith group and 78% of faith groups had worked with a settlement organization. Bramadat (2014) found in interviews that closed secularism – systemic boundaries and strict separation between government and religion – still holds power over settlement agencies and that agencies generally accept the restraints that come with it. The organizational and procedural inertia produced by closed secularism affects the ability of settlement organizations to successfully integrate newcomers in their communities (see also Mooney, 2014). A cultural shift towards open secularism demarcated by pragmatic collaboration is needed because it places the well-being of

newcomers at the forefront. Without such a cultural shift, and the mutual trust it requires, these partnerships will not reach their potential in providing holistic supports to newcomers.

Conducting Advocacy

Our respondents' predisposition to partnerships indicated a tacit awareness of how the context and interrelated components of the settlement sector are important considerations. This idea echoes the important theme in community development that interventions need to be multilevel and multiparty in order to address the whole milieu (see Schensul, 2009; Shinn & Toohey, 2003; Trickett, 2009). While faith groups are often on the front lines of settlement support, our data illustrates how more representation at LIPs is essential for creating stronger partnerships. Their involvement is a two-way street; faith groups need to be invited, but they also could make more of an effort to make their voices heard in the settlement sector. Promoting the awareness of resources that reportedly comes from faith and settlement partnerships is important because there is a chance that the value-added contribution of faith-based organizations may be underestimated. As such, there is a need to encourage policy-makers to create more opportunities to collaboratively address potential challenges. Naming and overcoming the challenges of collaborating with faith groups may not turn out to be much different than those involving other organizations who have value-driven mandates. Advocating for such conversations would also open the door to establishing effective communication and trust, which is essential when working with people in community settings (Primavera, & Brodsky, 2004).

Formalizing Partnerships

Our findings suggest that informal relationships are already common with both groups generally recognizing their benefits. They allow faith groups with limited capacity to serve newcomers' needs in specific areas (e.g., migrant farm workers) and they work well to solve a

crisis (e.g., responding to the influx of Syrian refugees in 2016). Because informal partnerships tend to be selective and episodic, they address the needs of some newcomers but miss the needs of others and will need to be re-created the next time a crisis occurs. Formal partnerships have the potential to address these limitations in two important ways. First, formal partnerships can help build networks of trust that allow for ongoing cross-sectoral newcomer support. Metanetworks of trust could include the assurance of long-term commitment, the sharing of dedicated resources, the clarity of communication channels, and the explicit recognition and appreciation of the skills and agendas of each other. Second, once trust is established, formal partnerships can provide the needed structure to address a range of service gaps. At the front-end of service delivery, formalized partnerships can provide reliable orientation services to newcomers who would not otherwise access them. These partnerships would leverage the strength of faith groups in making initial contact with newcomers who then become a consistent avenue in providing accurate and up-to-date information about government funded services (Ives and Witmer Sinha 2010). Formal partnerships can be beneficial in consistently responding to a range of other service gaps jointly identified by faith groups and settlement organizations. Pre-established understandings of roles reduce the need for regular negotiation of relationships, service provision responsibilities, and means of communicating with each other. This could reduce misunderstandings, limit overlapping services, and facilitate the identification of areas of cooperation.

Conclusion

We believe that the study presented in this article is timely. Broadly speaking, it brings needed empirical perspectives that can inform the growing dialogue about how best to navigate the place of faith within evolving western societies (Ager et al. 2015; Cnaan and Boddie 2006). It

does so as new “accounts for engagement” across faith and secular sectors are being sought to guide a post-secular age (Ager and Ager 2011: 560). More specifically, the article brings this discussion squarely into the realm of immigrant settlement.

For over a decade now, research on immigration and religious pluralism has been actively pursued in Canada (e.g., Bramadat and Biles 2005; Conner 2009). Yet the direct exploration of partnerships between faith groups and government-funded settlement providers remains clearly underdeveloped (Janzen et al. 2015). This at a time when demographic and policy trends suggest that the growing numbers of immigrants of faith coming to Canada has not yet peaked, and that these newcomers often do not access settlement services available to them but rather turn to their faith communities for initial support (Loewen and Friesen 2009). Finding ways to navigate the religious and secular divide through faith and settlement partnerships will therefore be an issue that will likely gain prominence into the foreseeable future.

The findings presented in this article can help to inform the needed rethink about the relationship between government and faith groups as they each pursue the common goal in helping newcomers to succeed (Bramadat 2014). A starting point is to recognize that, at least from the perspective of community stakeholders, these types of partnerships are more common, varied, and valued than previously thought, even if they are viewed by partners as sometimes challenging.

But more pointedly, the article suggests actions that can be taken for government-funded settlement services and faith-based groups to more effectively work in tandem. Key takeaways include the need to *share stories* of partnerships that do exist in order to provide a sense of the possible and to *explore differences* of what uniquely mobilizes faith groups and settlement organizations into partnership. Community stakeholders can also *enable a culture shift* towards

normalizing interactions among religious and government-funded groups which may require that they *conduct advocacy* by encouraging policy-makers to create more opportunities to collaboratively address challenges in these types of partnerships. Finally, there is a need to *formalize partnerships* so that they can be more sustainable and comprehensively serve the diversity of immigrants of faith. Heeding these calls for action may help faith and settlement partnerships to better promote positive settlement outcomes for newcomers.

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