



Connecting Elders from Ethno-cultural Communities
Impact Evaluation 2016-17



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

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1. Introduction and Summary

Project Overview

Connecting Elders from Ethno-cultural Communities (CEEC) is a collaborative program which uses a Community Development approach to support older adults from newcomer communities in building capacity and connections within the communities, among the communities, and between the communities and mainstream service providers. The program is jointly hosted by Carya (on behalf of The Way In Network) and the Ethno-cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC), and financed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

The Way In: Older Adult Services is a system navigation and case management program available to all older adults (65+) residing in Calgary. Newcomer older adults have historically been significantly under-represented in The Way In's client base, despite the partner agencies' attempts to increase accessibility via translation of written materials and cultural sensitivity training for its staff. In 2011, The Way In Network partnered with ECCC to launch the *CEEC* project, which recruited Elder Brokers from several of Calgary's ethno-cultural communities and provided them with training and support to bridge the gap between the service and the service users.

The program's Community Development approach has meant that activities, strategies and outcomes are directly informed by the voices of the community, as represented by Elder Brokers. As a result, although the program was conceived with a narrowly defined goal of decreasing newcomer seniors' barriers to accessing The Way In services, the domain of impact has grown over time to include impacts to the communities themselves, as well as connections with other mainstream service providers beyond The Way In.

Evaluation Overview

In 2016, the *CEEC* program contracted KRD Consulting Group to build on its evaluation framework and conduct an impact evaluation. Program staff and Elder Brokers have continually engaged in a variety of evaluative activities along two streams: (a) project monitoring using a Program Logic Model, quarterly and annual reporting to the funder (IRCC), and direct data entry to IRCC's database, and (b) developmental evaluation using Outcome Harvesting in 2014. The 2016 evaluation framework added an open learning stream, using a customized Reflective Practice module, and saw Outcome Harvesting used again to surface impacts accomplished in the intervening two years.

Outcome Harvesting is a utilization-focused evaluation methodology originally developed for the international development context¹ and revised for local community development evaluation in Calgary.² Its primary innovation consists in its capacity to “not measure progress towards predetermined outcomes or objectives, but rather [to] collect evidence of what has been achieved,

¹ *Outcome Harvesting*, Wilson-Grau & Britt, Ford Foundation 2012 (r.2013)

² *Outcome Harvesting 101*, Abboud, Claussen & Katsnelson, Community Development Learning Initiative 2014

and [to] work backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change.”³

The Outcome Harvest described in this report was carried out from September 2016 to February 2017. The evaluation was carried out by a participatory team consisting of two evaluation coaches (Roman Katsnelson and Erin McFarlane, *KRD Consulting Group*), program staff (Rose Ing, *CEEC Project Coordinator*, Carya and Noreen Mahmood, *Broker Coordinator, ECCC*), and the full Elder Broker team. The evaluation was designed to cover impacts experienced over the duration of the time period since the previous Outcome Harvest (i.e. 2015 and 2016). A variety of internal and external stakeholders were engaged as informants and substantiators.

Findings Summary

Impact was found across four domains: (1) changes for Elder Brokers themselves, (2) changes for newcomer older adults participating in the programs, (3) changes for systems and service providers, and (4) changes in ethno-cultural communities.

Elder Brokers were found to *have increased knowledge and capacity to inform others, benefit from improved community reputation and trust, and take on new leadership roles in community*. Despite having a high baseline due to the evaluation being limited to just the most recent two years of a five-year-old initiative, findings showcase an ongoing growth in capacity and the ongoing use of that capacity to community benefit. The program’s support via ongoing trainings and collective reflection is a significant contributor to this impact.

Older adults participating in events, activities and one-on-one conversations with Elder Brokers were found to *experience a decrease in social isolation, gain access to otherwise unknown information, utilize new information by accessing new services, and experience an improvement in independence, safety and comfort*. The Brokers’ capacity to initiate culturally relevant and community friendly events results in increased trust (see *reputation* above), resulting in a significant decrease in barriers to accessing services. In addition, through repeated community events focused on older adults, participants were able to connect with each other and their counterparts in other cultural communities, finding lasting social connections and decreasing social isolation. Finally, through acting on their newly acquired knowledge, older adults were able to access a variety of supports and services allowing them to age with dignity and in place.

Service providers, including The Way In, ECCC and other mainstream providers such as the Alzheimer’s Society and Alberta Health Services, were found to have improved access to their services by acting on feedback provided by Elder Brokers. The bi-directional design of the program, wherein the Elder Brokers are responsible both to educate their community about services and educate the services about their communities, is a direct contributor to this outcome. Elder Brokers also leveraged their standing and reputation in the communities to bring the voice of the newcomer older adult to several citywide initiatives, including the steering committee for Age-Friendly Calgary.

³ Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012

Communities experienced more significant change during the past two years than was found during the previous evaluation. As communities continued to have access to knowledge and continued to build stronger connections to services and other communities, they were found, for the first time, to initiate new opportunities for their older adults. Communities, by their nature loosely organized, require significant time and ongoing support to move from awareness to action, and the Elder Brokers' work in providing that support has been a critical contribution to this impact.

2. Outcome Harvest

The Outcome Harvest was guided by four evaluation questions, referred to in the methodology as “useable questions”:

1. In the last two years, what changes have Elder Brokers experienced in their capacity, personal impact, resilience and identity, and how did the CEEC program contribute?
2. In the last two years, what quality of life changes – including basic needs, social connections, sense of self and dignity – occurred for Older Adults from ethno-cultural communities, and how did the CEEC program contribute?
3. In the last two years, how have service provider systems and approaches changed, and how did Elder Brokers contribute?
4. In the last two years, what changes occurred in relationships, understanding, and expectations of relationships between Elder Brokers and their communities, and how did the CEEC program contribute?

The full text of each question was used to gather and organize information and to substantiate hypotheses. For convenience and clarity, the present report refers to each question by its primary social actor (the entity experiencing change). Each useable question yielded multiple outcome statements, which are presented in sequence in this section.

Question 1: Elder Brokers

Outcome Statement 1a: *Elder Brokers became more knowledgeable about programs and benefits for older adults, including, but not limited to, The Way In services.*

Over the past two years, Elder Brokers became more knowledgeable about programs and benefits for older adults and have grown in their capacity to share this information with older adults at community meetings, outreach activities, and in one-on-one consultations.

Elder Brokers help older adults in their communities to better understand the programs and services available to them, including, but not limited to, accessing The Way In. When uncertain about something, Elder Brokers are sufficiently connected and empowered to try to discover the answer to the question.

Outcome Statement 1b: *Elder Brokers continued to gain community reputation as knowledgeable and trusted people to turn to when help is needed.*

Over the past two years, Elder Brokers continued to gain community reputation as knowledgeable and trusted people to turn to when help is needed, and word is spreading through the community that the Elder Brokers can help. Importantly, some community members are hesitant at first to disclose their problems; therefore, it takes several meetings with a potential client to develop trust. Brokers are able to use their reputation to gain contact, and their skill to gain trust and build relationships, with vulnerable individuals in the community.

Outcome Statement 1c: *Elder Brokers took on new leadership roles, both in their communities and in mainstream systems and organizations.*

Over the past two years, Elder Brokers took on new leadership roles in their communities, by developing new programs and activities for older adults, and by partnering with community associations to open new opportunities and physical gathering spaces that were previously not available. Elder Brokers also led in the context of mainstream organizations, by serving on committees, community association boards, and as panelists.

Examples of new initiatives spearheaded by Elder Brokers in their communities include multi-generational computer classes, drop-in social circles, and new volunteer opportunities to combat loneliness and isolation.

Question 2: Older Adults

Outcome Statement 2a: *Newcomer older adults who connected with the CEEC program experienced increased social inclusion.*

Over the past two years, newcomer older adults who connected with the CEEC program experienced increased social inclusion. Elder Brokers initiated new community engagement opportunities (see above). Through participation in these opportunities, newcomer older adults developed and strengthened both bonding and bridging social capital, improving integration outcomes and increasing resiliency to age-related risks.

Outcome Statement 2b: *Older adults who connected with the CEEC program gained access to information that was previously not known in the community.*

Over the past two years, older adults who connected with the CEEC program gained access to information that was previously not known in the community. Elder Brokers organized semi-annual presentations and Service Days in each community, creating new knowledge about mainstream services and opportunities (e.g. wills, advanced care planning). Individuals who were exposed to such information gained the capacity to take action and prepare for age-related change in ways often taken for granted for non-immigrant older adults.

Outcome Statement 2c: *Ethnically diverse older adults who connected with the CEEC program gained new connections to mainstream services.*

Over the past two years, ethnically diverse older adults who connected with the CEEC program gained new connections to mainstream services, after acting on newly gained awareness of services. Elder Brokers act as a crucial liaison for many newcomer older adults by being the only point of contact in the client's language. Due to confidentiality concerns, many older adults prefer not to rely on the assistance of friends or family to connect with the help they need. Elder Brokers' contribution decreases this barrier to service accessibility for people, resulting in greater overall system capacity.

Outcome Statement 2d: *Older Adults who connected with the CEEC program experienced an improved quality of life through accessing supports to live in independence, safety, and comfort.*

Over the past two years, older adults who connected with the CEEC program experienced an improved quality of life through accessing independence, safety, and comfort supports. Through their connection with the program, older adults discovered their eligibility for health supports (e.g. recliners, chairlifts, supplementary health care).

Question 3: Systems and Services

Outcome Statement 3a: *Service providers improved access to their services by acting on feedback provided by Elder Brokers.*

Over the past two years, service providers have improved access to their services acting on feedback provided by Elder Brokers, such as creating translated materials and including more information pertinent to older adults in their outreach materials, thus reaching more diverse communities. Service providers reported being in “regular consultation” with Elder Brokers to continually refine their approach. However, as access levels improve, service providers reported a systemic limit to that benefit due to staff availability.

Outcome Statement 3b: *Elder Brokers connected voices of diversity to broad initiatives involving older adults.*

In the past two years, Elder Brokers connected diverse voices to initiatives involving older adults by participating in academic research projects at the University of Calgary, broad policy initiatives like the City of Calgary Age-Friendly Strategy, and various community-level presentations. Elder Brokers create important linkages by often being the only representative from an immigrant community at age-related initiatives, or the only representative from the older adult population at immigration-related ones.

Question 4: Communities

Outcome Statement 4a: *Communities have increased awareness, become more connected to organizations, and are more likely to initiate older-adult specific work.*

Over the past two years, communities have become more knowledgeable about available services, more connected to organizations, and more aware of opportunities to participate in initiatives involving older adults. As a result of ongoing, persistent Community Development work, communities are more likely to initiate processes and opportunities specifically for older adults.

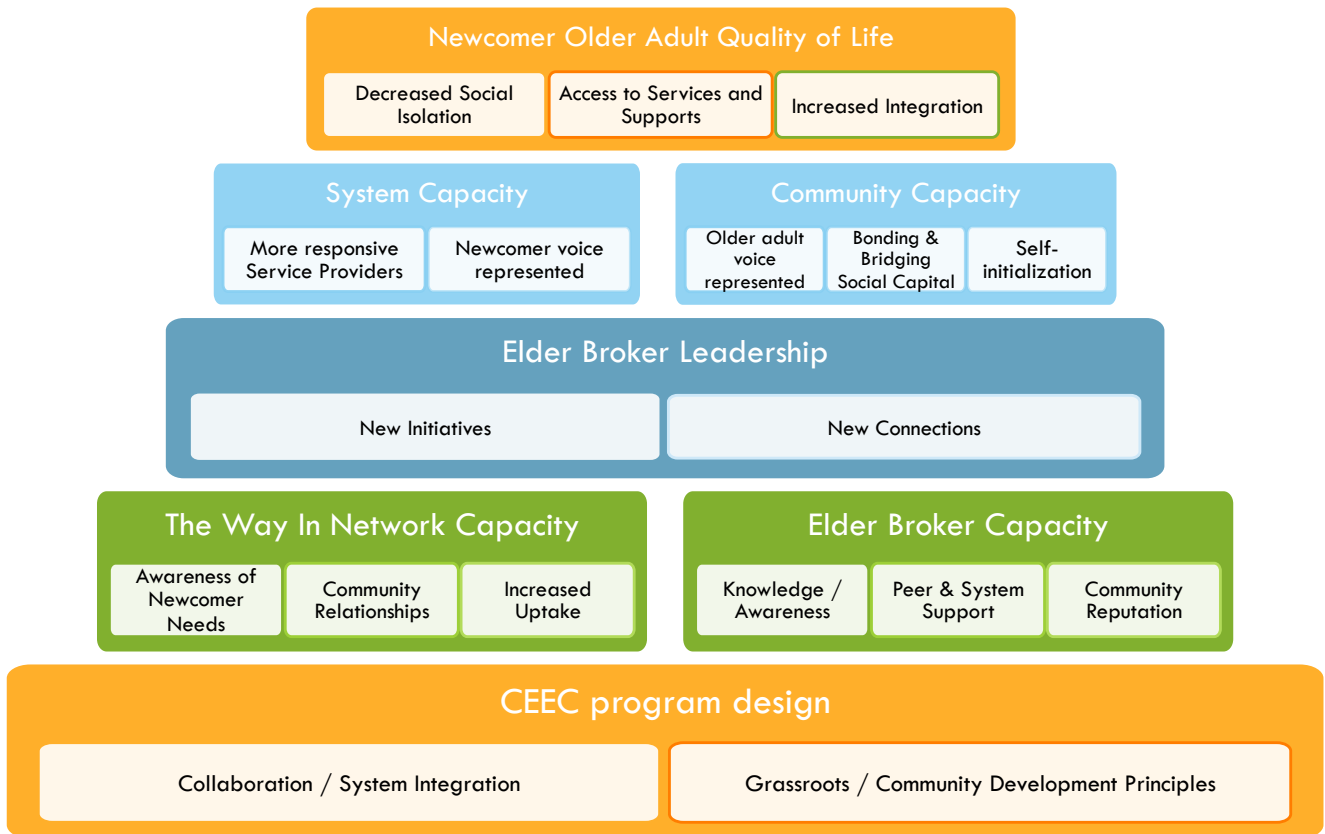
Outcome Statement 4b: *Community Leaders have supported the work of Elder Brokers by providing new space and time for Elder Broker activities.*

Over the past two years, community leaders have supported the work of Elder Brokers by providing space and time for Elder Broker activities. Referral intakes from the Elder Brokers are almost always from a community location where the Brokers have been invited to speak and share their knowledge with seniors.

3. Theory of Change

The findings in this evaluation were synthesized to develop a draft Theory of Change, with the goal of describing the work of the program as a model which can be replicated in other contexts. The Theory of Change centers the grassroots approach of the design, visualizing impact flowing from the bottom upward. Thus, the lower elements of the change pyramid build a support for the higher elements which require them.

The visual Theory of Change is followed by a brief description of each level.



1. CEEC Program Design

Two features of program design were found to be critical contributors to one or more outcomes found in the evaluation.

The first is a collaborative and integrated governance structure. From the outset, the program was designed to be housed collaboratively, with *both* the mainstream service providers and the community representative organizations positioned as internal stakeholders. This has proved to be an important iterative development of previous broker models – ensuring commitment to the success of the

“bridge” from both sides. Such commitment is a critical success driver, which enabled the work to be truly bi-directional, informing changes both within communities and within service provider systems.

The second design feature is the program’s commitment to Community Development principles – namely the intentional building of trust and reciprocity among the Elder Brokers, combined with the positioning of Broker voices as equal partners in the program’s mission. These commitments serve as success factors in growing impact past the immediate or short-term stages.

2. Direct Capacity Impacts

Program activities, rooted in the design structures specified above, led to improved capacity in the partnering service provider (The Way In services, in this case) and in individuals serving as Elder Brokers.

Elder Brokers benefit from direct access to service providers and to each other in a series of regularly scheduled gatherings. Elder Broker gatherings are facilitated as training sessions, community conversations, and reflective practice sessions – resulting in growing knowledge and awareness of the array of needs and opportunities faced by older adults in the context of settlement and integration processes and in increased confidence in their own capacity to provide supports. Over time, program activities positioning Elder Brokers as community leaders resulted in increased community reputation, therefore creating the capacity to create new responsive and relevant initiatives.

As an intended outcome, The Way In services were able to connect to elders in ethno-cultural communities, both directly and as represented by Elder Brokers. As a result, relationships between the service provider and newcomers grew and strengthened, diminishing barriers to access, increasing uptake, and enabling The Way In agencies to better structure their practice to increase relevance to the brokered communities.

In addition, just as The Way In – previously focused on older adults – was learning to add an explicit focus on newcomers, the Ethno-Cultural Council – previously focused on newcomers – was learning to add an explicit focus on older adults.

The impacts at this level were found and documented during the 2014 evaluation, and monitored throughout the project in funder reports. While new Elder Broker capacity was surfaced during the present (2016) evaluation, the baseline was already significant from 2014 onward.

3. Elder Broker Leadership

As documented in the 2016 evaluation, Elder Brokers took on significant new leadership roles during the most recent two years of the project. The ongoing support and grassroots design of the CEEC program enabled the Brokers to leverage their new knowledge and improving reputation, to assess the needs in their own communities and to see themselves as change agents capable of initiating new opportunities. Their leadership is responsible for broadening the overall impact of the program beyond the initial stakeholders of the partnering agencies – engaging more mainstream service providers, more community leaders, and creating socialization and empowerment opportunities for older adults.

4. System and Community Capacity Impacts

Due to the broadening scope of activity, the scope of impact has been broadened as well. Impacts experienced early on by The Way In have subsequently been experienced by other service providers, organizations and policy makers working in the Older Adult sector in Calgary. Where previously, connecting with a breadth of ethno-cultural older adult populations was a significant challenge, systems can now access a single entity representing 15 communities and over 20 languages. Organizations and service providers who have connected with the Elder Brokers have drawn benefit by becoming more relevant to the settlement and integration process of older adults. Policy makers are able to access a broadly representative immigrant voice and perspective.

At the same time, impacts experienced early on by the ECCC have subsequently been rippling through the participating communities. Communities are now more aware of the specific needs felt by their aging population, as well as of their gifts and capacities for leadership. Community leaders are more likely to inquire about possibilities relevant to older adults, and to support Elder Broker initiatives with access to space and time. As well, through the Elder Brokers' relationships to each other, many communities have forged new cross-cultural connections across all ages, increasing their bridging social capital and overall community resiliency.

5. Newcomer Older Adult Quality of Life Impacts

Older adults from ethno-cultural communities who interact with CEEC and the Elder Brokers have been shown to experience improvements in their quality of life in a number of ways, including but not limited to access to supports from The Way In. Overcoming the barriers to accessing mainstream services that are common to all newcomers is a significant impact on its own, and has been shown and monitored consistently from the early days of the program. However, as Elder Broker leadership initiatives take root and community and system capacity increases, so too do the benefits that accrue to the older adults who now experience a broader increase in social inclusion and improved integration into the multi-cultural fabric of Canada.

3. Further Information

For clarification about The Way In, please contact Carya at 403.269.9888 or see www.thewayincalgary.ca.

For information and questions about the Evaluation Framework, Theory of Change, Outcome Harvesting, and the findings in this report, please contact KRD Consulting Group at info@hellokrd.net.