



Immigrant
Women's
Leadership and
Employment
Mentorship
Project

REPORT





INTRODUCTION

YWCA St. John's

The YWCA has a rich history in St. John's dating back to 1925 and has long been an integral part of the local community, demonstrating a commitment to girls, women, and their families. As a women-led service organization, our programs and services are aimed at empowering and facilitating access for women and girls, with a focus on assisting women and girls to achieve the rights, resources, and opportunities to shape their own lives and define their communities. We work towards the improved status of women locally and through our affiliation with the YWCA Canada and World YWCA.

As part of YWCA Canada, we are part of an extensive network of 32 Member Associations spanning the country from coast to coast to coast, each committed to working together on national priorities and upholding shared standards across the country. Member Associations share program models, best practices, governance and risk management practices, and more, contributing to a strong and vibrant national YWCA, which proves a rich resource for local Member Associations.

YWCA St. John's is committed to community development and collaboration and has strong partnerships with numerous local community agencies. Over the past several years, YWCA St. John's has partnered with several local organizations who specialize in newcomer settlement service delivery, engaging in front line programs serving newcomer girls and women. Through a partnership with Multicultural Women's Organization of NL (MWONL), we expanded delivery of their existing English Conversation Practice Circles with newcomer women. Partnering with the Association for New Canadians, or ANC, (SWIS Program – Settlement Workers In Schools), YWCA St. John's delivered our GirlSpace program with newcomer youth. We've also worked closely with ANC staff to engage newcomer youth in our existing programs, including our Young Women's Leadership Program and our National Career Day event, where young women had an opportunity to connect with women leaders from diverse, traditional, non-traditional, and in-demand careers.

Project Overview

The 2016 census enumerated that 7.5 million foreign-born people came to Canada through the immigration process. According to the census, Immigrants form 21.6% of Canada's population and represent 1 in 5 persons in Canada¹. The number of Newcomer/Immigrant women and girls is estimated to be 3,544,400², representing 21.2% of Canada's female population. If current immigration trends continue, Statistics Canada estimates that immigrants will make up 11.1 million of the population by 2031. Of this population, 5.8 million, just over half of the immigrant population will be women³. By 2031, newcomer/immigrant women will make 27.4% of Canada's overall female population⁴. While there are many available support services for newcomers, a recent scan found that "there is a palpable lack of employment support services tailored specifically for immigrant women in NL,"⁵; it appears evident that existing services do not take into account the lived experience of women availing of the services. It is therefore important that an intersectional gender perspective be applied when developing immigrant settlement services, to ensure their accessibility to the increasing population of newcomer/immigrant women and girls.

Research has shown that finding meaningful employment, creating networks of opportunities and access to "well-resourced settlement agencies with extensive information about access to health, social and other community services, such as language training, affordable housing, affordable and accessible daycare, adequate public transportation, counseling, and legal services" are key factors in sustainably attracting and retaining immigrants. For many newcomer women in Canada, these factors often have challenges and barriers that significantly impact their immigration decisions. Through this project, YWCA has identified key barriers and challenges to economic security that are faced by newcomer women. These barriers and challenges include language-based concerns and minority discrimination, a lack of networks and connection, issues with foreign credential recognition, as well as insufficient information about opportunities and development. These challenges and barriers ultimately hinder many newcomer women's economic self-sufficiency and successful labour market participation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

¹<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14217-eng.htm>

²A Jurisdictional Scan: *Employment Mentorship Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Canada* (Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2019), page 2.

³A Jurisdictional Scan: *Employment Mentorship Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Canada* (Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2019), page 33.

⁴A Jurisdictional Scan: *Employment Mentorship Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Canada* (Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2019), page 4.

⁵A Jurisdictional Scan: *Employment Mentorship Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Canada* (Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 2019), page 34.

Project Objective

The overall goal of the project was to provide skill-development and capacity-building opportunities among newcomer women from planning to research to action. In addition, the project was an opportunity for YWCA and community partners to work together on the creation of a symposium, as well as conduct community-based research to inform the development of strategies which support newcomer women's economic self-sufficiency and successful labour market participation. The project activities were delivered between January 2019 and December 2019.

The project aimed to explore the barriers to labour market integration experienced by newcomer women, and identify strategies to overcome the barriers and lead to economic self-sufficiency. During the first phase, YWCA worked with community and industry partners to coordinate a Multicultural Women in Leadership Symposium, called Opportunity Knocks. Opportunity Knocks focused on ways to support and encourage women from diverse cultural backgrounds to make long-term attachments to employment in their communities by identifying the barriers and challenges they currently face in gaining economic self-sufficiency.

The second phase of the project engaged newcomer women in the role of peer researchers to conduct community-based research. Through capacity-building workshops, the peer researchers developed crucial leadership skills and were well-positioned to conduct research that was essential to the objectives of the project. By engaging persons with lived experience in this capacity, the project was able to keep newcomer women at the center of the project and applied the critical lens of lived experience through which all data gathered through the symposium and community-based research was filtered, analyzed and presented.

This project added to local knowledge about the experiences of newcomer women in Newfoundland and Labrador. The project created opportunities for women with lived experience to participate in identifying the challenges and barriers they face, as well as developing the solutions to increase their ability to participate equally and fully in the labour market. Additionally, the project also created opportunities for people with lived experience to share their experience with various employers, service providers, government, and stakeholders in the community.

PHASE 1

Community Partners

YWCA St. John's Immigrant Women's Leadership and Employment Mentorship Project mobilized the support of many community collaborators to achieve the objectives of the project.

We would like to sincerely thank:

- Dr. Delores V. Mulling, Associate Professor at the School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland
- Dr. Sobia Shaheen Shaikh, Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland
- Carey Majid, Executive Director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission
- Willow Anderson, Mind the Gap Consulting
- Rhonda Tulk-Lane, Director Business Solutions, St. John's Board of Trade
- Jennifer Cheeks, Career Development Coordinator & Project Manager Employment Assistance Services, Women in Resource Development Corporation
- Raya Majid, Immigration Program Officer, Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism
- Constanza Safatle, PARTAKES Coordinator, RIAC
- Kerri Ivany, Instructor at Creative Sewing Atelier, RIAC: Local Sewing Atelier
- Roshni Antony, Manager HR Advisory Services, City of St. John's: HR & Recruitment

We would especially like to acknowledge the work and dedication of the project peer researchers whose knowledge, experience, and care, created a space for newcomer/immigrant women to share their experiences. Thank you:

- Constanza Safatle
- Foroughsadat Emam
- Patricia Miah
- Nabila Qureshi
- Sadia Chowdhury

Our Sincere thanks to the Multicultural Women's Organisation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Internationalisation Office at Memorial University, and Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council for their collaboration throughout the project, particularly in hosting focus groups.

Phase 1: Engaging Persons with Lived Experience in Identifying Challenges and Barriers

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS SYMPOSIUM

YWCA St. John's partnered with Dr. Delores Mullings (Memorial University School of Social Work) to host a symposium. Through this relationship, the project created new collaborative partnerships as well as strengthened existing relationships across the province to facilitate and plan *Opportunity Knocks*, a symposium focused on exploring solutions to career and employment challenges facing women of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds in Newfoundland and Labrador. We worked with Free Form Events, who brought together the vision of the symposium taking on the logistical needs such as coordinating the venue, catering, and the facilitation of sessions throughout the day.

The symposium was held on March 13, 2019 at the Emera Innovation Exchange (Memorial University, Signal Hill Campus). The symposium included a keynote from Roshni Antony, who brought personal lived experience and 20 years of progressive strategic Human Resource management experience, driving employee relations, employee engagement, performance management, talent management, and recruitment & selection. The symposium offered a session for newcomer women with Dr. Delores Mullings and Sobia Shaikh, called *In Conversation: Exploring Visions of Career Success Among Newcomer Racialized Women*. This session created space for newcomer racialized⁶ women to share their experiences of career success in overcoming racism and xenophobia. Women were encouraged to define their ideas of success and to share their stories to honor the spaces from which they have gathered their knowledge.

The facilitators also shared their experiences of racism in the workplace as well as the tools and strategies that they have used to attain success. The symposium included a session for businesses, HR managers, and employers with Willow Anderson, Mind the Gap Consulting) and Carey Majid (NL Human Rights Commission of NL, entitled *Creating*



Mayor Danny Breen, City of St. John's

⁶Racialized refers to anyone who experiences racism because of their race, skin colour, ethnic background, accent, culture or religion, which includes people of colour, Aboriginal peoples, and ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural minorities who are targets of racism. *Everybody Belongs: A toolkit for applying Intersectionality*. Joanna Simpson. CRIAW/ICREF, June 2009.

a Welcoming and Inclusive Work Environment. This session explored how organizations could create an environment that is welcoming to and respectful of women of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. Focusing on what employers and HR professionals need to know, the presenters shared practical tips for the workplace and addressed common questions regarding the duty to accommodate.

The symposium featured an ‘un-panel’ session that facilitated collaborative sharing of knowledge, experiences, and skills. The idea of the ‘un-panel’ was to break up the long line of expertise at the front of the room and immerse panelists in small groups of symposium attendees to encourage more collaborative knowledge sharing.

Each of the panelists were selected as they offered information in the following areas:

- Jennifer Cheeks, Career Development Coordinator, Women in Resource Development Corporation (WRDC): Careers in Science, Trades, and Technology
- Rhonda Tulk-Lane, Director of Business Solutions, St John’s Board of Trade: Business & Entrepreneurial Career Supports
- Raya Majid, Immigration Program Officer, Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism: Immigration and Employment
- Constanza Safatle, PARTAKES Coordinator, RIAC: Reflections from Life as a Newcomer Woman
- Kerri Ivany, Instructor at Creative Sewing Atelier, RIAC: Local Sewing Atelier, Program Success
- Roshni Antony, Manager HR Advisory Services, City of St. John’s: HR & Recruitment



Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada

By working collaboratively to develop *Opportunity Knocks* the project brought a wealth of expertise on how newcomer women are currently engaging with the labour market and community organizations, along with first-hand experiences of how newcomer women in the community have developed as entrepreneurs, and with successful careers in the province. Moreover, the symposium was an exciting opportunity to explore strategies to develop employment mentorship opportunities and support entrepreneurial activities by immigrant women.

We also worked with the Public Engagement and Planning Division of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to collect data throughout the symposium. The division took the identified challenges and barriers from the discussions and presented it back to attendees clearly and concisely. The challenges and barriers identified at the symposium were then shared with the peer researchers as we entered phase two of the project. The information collected from the symposium formed the foundation of the community-based research which engaged newcomer women as peer researchers in developing solutions to these barriers and challenges.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED FROM THE SYMPOSIUM

Despite the growing number of female newcomers in the province, the symposium revealed there is a lack of awareness of the migration experiences of women in policy and program development as well as support service delivery. An environmental scan conducted by a YWCA St. John’s gender studies student intern found that there are several Employment and Career services and programs that specifically target immigrants such as those offered by the Association for New Canadian Axis Services, Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC), Memorial University (MUN) Internationalisation Office, as well as The Multicultural Women Organisation of Newfoundland and Labrador which offers programs specifically to meet the needs of immigrant women. Data gathered at the symposium found that despite these available resources, there remains a lack of employment support services that are specific to ensuring the equal participation of newcomer women in the labour market.

Attendees of the symposium identified the following as the key barriers to economic security and equal participation of immigrant women in the labour market in Newfoundland and Labrador.

BARRIER 1: PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Many newcomer women need time to establish professional networks and connections in Newfoundland and Labrador. A lack of networks and connections with local businesses and organizations hinders the ability of newcomer women to participate in the labour market. According to attendees, the process of forming relationships in the community is not only long and arduous but requires a commitment from employers to move beyond one-off interactions and to develop long term relationships. However, without sustainable funding for mentorship/internship programs, many employers are reluctant to invest in this commitment. Additionally, the lack of opportunities to meet with various potential employers through networking events or other means make forming these connections difficult. The lack of established networks and connections directly impacts how newcomer women gain Canadian work experience and credentials.

BARRIER 2: FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Newcomer women in Newfoundland and Labrador who come to Canada with foreign credentials find that their international experience is under-valued. Navigating licensing and regularity issues towards accreditation and the recognition of qualifications is arduous and time-consuming. Additionally, there is a lack of opportunities to accumulate Canadian work experience through voluntary work or internships.



Roshni Antony Manager - HR Advisory Services, City of John's

BARRIER 3: ACCESSING INFORMATION & RESOURCES

According to attendees that there is insufficient access to comprehensive information regarding current immigrant employment services, programs, and resources in Newfoundland and Labrador. Furthermore, attendees indicated that current services and programs lack flexibility and assumes that the same approach works for all immigrants. Additionally, particular immigrant employment services and programs exclude certain groups of immigrants from availing of them based on their immigration status. Immigration and employment services and programs should ensure all groups of immigrants, whether they are refugees, temporary foreign workers, economic or entrepreneurial, international students, spouses, and families can access the supports that they need. The lack of collaboration and communication among stakeholders, institutions, and organizations, including support services, further contributes to the challenges newcomers have in accessing information.

BARRIER 4: LANGUAGE TRAINING

Immigrants who come to Canada with foundational English skills face difficulties accessing available English as A Second Languages resources as well as understanding employment resources, and therefore have difficulties interacting with the labour market. On the other hand, newcomer women with advanced levels of English do not have enough opportunities to improve and develop professional language skills because the majority of English as a Second Language classes teach basic English. Furthermore, the cost of professional English classes is often a financial barrier to many newcomer women.

BARRIER 5: DISCRIMINATION & RACISM

As immigrants to Canada and the province, many immigrants experience discrimination and racism in the workplace. For many newcomer women, cultural barriers create challenges when engaging with the labour market. Attendees identified that employers and service providers lacked the cultural awareness and anti-racism knowledge to reduce the impacts of cultural barriers and discrimination faced by newcomer women in hiring processes, leadership training, and in the workplace.

PHASE 2

Phase 2: Community-Based Research to Develop Solutions and Recommendations

From the data collected at the symposium, we were able to move into phase two of the project. Throughout phase two of the project, we sustained the relationships formed through organizing the symposium. We continued to work with Dr. Mullings on employment issues faced by racialized newcomer women across the province, traveling to the town of Clarenville to learn from the experiences of newcomer women living outside of St. John's.

During phase two of the project YWCA St. John's engaged newcomer women with personal lived experience to develop solutions to the barriers identified at Opportunity Knocks and work towards forming recommendations that would lead to optimal methods in supporting newcomer women to full participation in the labour market. By conducting community-based research with persons with lived experience, the recommendations developed in this project better capture the specific challenges faced by newcomer women in Newfoundland and Labrador.



Kyekue Mweemba, Wendolyn Schlamp, Deanne Howlett, YWCA St. John's Staff



PEER RESEARCHERS



Constanza Safatle

The peer researchers were recruited through YWCA St. John's social media and networks throughout the community. The recruitment poster was shared with the Local Immigration Partnership Newsletter, Refugee Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC) Newsletter, MUN Internationalisation Office Listserv, as well as MWONL's newsletter. By reaching out through these community partners YWCA recruited five newcomer women with diverse lived experiences.



Foroughsadat Emam

The peer researchers were a critical lens through which the community-based research was informed and conducted. Peer researchers were engaged at every stage of the project, including planning the symposium, collecting data through focus groups and attending additional conferences and meetings such as a second full day event called *Moving Forward*, held on October 2, 2019 (again, in partnership with Dr. Mullings). The engagement of peer researchers in this capacity provided YWCA St. John's with an opportunity to research promising practices of a potential employment mentorship/internship program model for newcomer women.



Sadia Chowdhury

Through their participation in this project, the peer researchers attended two capacity-building workshops with Dr. Mullings. These capacity-building workshops covered topics such as research methodology, research ethics, and research interviewing skills; these skills were not only crucial in collecting data for this project but, it is expected, will also support future, personal career goals of the peer research team. During the capacity building workshops, we developed the research questions for the focus groups and determined which service providers in our community we would partner with to host the focus groups to reach many diverse newcomer women voices. We held three focus groups. These focus groups were led and facilitated by peer researchers.



Patricia Miah

Upon completion of their role, the peer researchers provided feedback on their experiences in the project because of the potential it has to contribute to the development of a mentorship/internship program that provides newcomer women with an opportunity to build on their skills and increase their employment assets.



Nabila Qureshi

The following are quotes that sum up their overall experience in this project:

“ A community building project first building relations and exchanges knowledge and skills, and then strengthen the services it provides to the community. As a peer researcher, I feel content knowing that we all experienced this together. ”

“ Participating in this project as a Peer Researcher gave me a better understanding of the specific employment challenges and barriers newcomer/immigrant women face in St. Johns and neighboring localities. ”

“ It was good to work for YWCA, to meet new people as peer researchers as well as study participants. ”

“ Great initiative! I hope I am able to participate in more YWCA-related projects in the future. ”

“ Participating in this project as a Peer Researcher, I realized how we all need to have a safe space to talk about our challenges and get advice from other newcomer women to deal with them. It shouldn't be a one woman's struggle. ”

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH: WHAT WE HEARD

As an effective method to collect information for this project, we partnered with RIAC, MWONL, and Internationalisation Office at MUN to host focus groups facilitated by the project peer researchers. The questions asked during these focus groups were based on the data at the symposium and encouraged participants to work towards solutions and recommendations towards addressing the five key barriers identified at Opportunity Knocks.

BARRIER 1:

Professional Network

Participants from all three focus groups unanimously supported the need for newcomer women to build networks and connections with employers/businesses and organizations in the community. Participants agreed that although networking events are a great avenue to meet potential employers, they do not always provide the long-term connections that are needed for employment. Similarly, participants brought to attention that while they are encouraged to volunteer to make connections and gain Canadian work experience, many immigrants - particularly women - cannot afford to volunteer as a result of domestic and financial pressures. Rather, participants supported the idea of mentorship/internship programs that emphasized job shadowing and skill development would be more valuable as they would be a means through which immigrants could gain Canadian work experience, as well as show their existing knowledge and skills.

BARRIER 2:

Foreign Credential Recognition

The difficulties of foreign credential recognition leaves many newcomer women exhausted and without clear options of how to grow their careers based on their previous experience. Participants agreed that immigrants, regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and government should work together to develop resources that streamline the means of gaining credential recognition. Additionally, since the process of foreign credential recognition could be costly, participants emphasized the need for provisions that increase access to financial support to gain recognition or retrain in another field entirely for newcomer women.

BARRIER 3:

Accessing Information & Resources

Throughout the focus groups, it was apparent that there is a lack of consistent information-sharing about the services and supports for newcomers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Participants expressed the need for centralized resources or center for newcomers to access resources about employment and current labour market news and opportunities. Participants also agreed that there is insufficient information on settling into the province. Participants unanimously agreed the centralized resources should also include information about health care, childcare, housing, education, transportation, and financial supports in the city. Additionally, the resources should be accessible in various methods; online, in-person, and in various languages.

BARRIER 4:

Language Training

The lack of language resources was brought up several times throughout the focus groups. Participants agreed that increasing access to English as a Second Language (ESL) courses would enable newcomer women to have equal access to employment resources and opportunities. Participants agreed that newcomers are hyper-aware of the language and communication barrier and how it may impact their ability to interact with the local labour market confidently. Although ESL resources currently exist, participants found that most are at the basic level and do not provide opportunities to learn professional levels of English that are affordable and accessible. Participants suggested that practical mentorship/internship programs and volunteering are a way for immigrants to practice their English in the workplace.

BARRIER 5:

Discrimination and Racism

Participants shared how discrimination and racism has impacted their engagement in the labour market. Participants agreed that employers should have diverse hiring practices that open up opportunities for immigrants. Additionally, participants said that many newcomers feel that businesses and organizations are reluctant to hire newcomers based on where they are from, their accent, names, and assumed cultural barriers. Employers should be educated on anti-racism and discrimination practices to create welcoming and supportive workplaces and hiring processes. Furthermore, there should be increased awareness of workers' rights and responsibilities for both the newcomer employee as well as employers.

CONCLUSION: PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are drawn from the stories, ideas, and potential solutions we heard throughout the Immigrant Women’s Leadership and Employment Mentorship Project. We offer recommendations specific to reducing the identified barriers and challenges that prevent the equal participation of newcomer women in the labour market. The recommendations are offered to address the specific goals of The Way Forward on Immigration and increasing the retention of newcomer women in NL.

YWCA St. John’s recommends that:

1. To address barrier 1, Professional Networks:

More funding should be made available to support the development and piloting of a mentorship/internship program that specifically aims to improve the employment opportunities of all newcomer women, from refugees, students, spouses, and economic immigrants. This could be achieved through multiple avenues, including the following:

- a. Piloting a program similar to YWCA Metro Vancouver’s Elevate Skills Program. “Elevate Skills is a program for newcomer women who are either looking for their first job in Canada or who have been working in jobs that are not related to their experiences and backgrounds and want to transition back to their careers or to a different field.”
- b. Funding the development of a mentorship/internship program that offers capacity-building and skill development opportunities as a way of gaining Canadian work experience. Providing financial incentives to employers and programs to offer paid work/integrated learning placements for newcomer women with international experience. Encouraging local businesses to hire/mentor immigrant women by providing wage subsidies. This process should be supported by a service provider to ensure that the mentorship and employment is beneficial for both the mentee and mentor, thereby developing stronger long-term connections.

2. To address barrier 2, Foreign Credentials Recognition:

A Foreign Credentials Recognition Action Plan should be developed with key stakeholders. This plan should include:

- a. The formation of a Foreign Credential Council that brings together immigrants, regulatory bodies, educational institutions, professional bodies and policymakers to develop an efficient method of gaining credential recognition that values international experiences and education.
- b. A national environmental scan of current foreign credential recognition programs across the country that could be piloted in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- c. The development and implementation of programs that offer internships/job placements for persons with foreign qualifications as a means of reaccreditation and a way to gain Canadian work experience.

3. To address barrier 3, Accessing Information and Resources:

There should be greater collaboration between community organizations and immigrant support services to ensure access to concise, consistent information regarding all immigrant employment services and supports in Newfoundland and Labrador. This could be achieved through multiple avenues, including the following:

- a. Developing a centralized resource, either online or physical, that would enable immigrants to access comprehensive settlement information and toolkits. For example, the Internationalization Office provides international students with a guidebook that provides information from everything required to live in the province as a student, such as transportation, childcare, health care, and employment.
- b. Ensuring that community organizations, businesses, and immigrant supports services all have access to the most current policies and processes to ensure that newcomers do not receive conflicting information.

4. To address barrier 4, Language Training:

A commitment should be made to increasing language supports and resources for all immigrants regardless of their immigration path. As well as to work with immigrant support services to develop plain language materials and offer services in various languages. This could be achieved through multiple avenues, including the following:

- a. Developing a plain language guide for employers to use when advertising employment opportunities.
- b. Increasing access to advanced-level education in English to meet the language skills needed for work.

5. To address barrier 5, Discrimination and Racism:

A Labour Market Discrimination and Anti-Racism Action Plan should be developed to outline a province-wide commitment to addressing discrimination and racism faced by immigrant women in Newfoundland and Labrador. This plan should:

- a. Educate institutions, businesses, and organizations on the benefits and opportunities that diverse experiences contribute to the workplace.
- b. Fund the development of programs and resources that educate institutions, businesses, and organizations on anti-racism and discrimination practices that work towards reducing barriers to hiring, leadership training, and workplace skills training of newcomer women.
- c. Work with employers, including labor unions and professional bodies, to implement the policies and practices developed in the Labour Market Discrimination and Anti-Racism Action Plan.

THANK YOU

We want to sincerely thank the
Department of Advanced Education,
Skills and Labour, Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank
you to all our community partners
who contributed to this project.

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The Immigrant Women's Leadership and Employment Mentorship Project Report was written by YWCA St. John's Program Coordinator, Kyekue Mweemba.



The Immigrant Women's Leadership and Employment Mentorship Project was funded by the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador