

**Leveraging Technology to Connect Volunteers with Government-Assisted  
Refugees, Protected Persons and Ukrainian CUAET Arrivals for Social Support  
(X229716011)**

**Evaluation of the Welcome Group Program: Final Report**

May, 2024

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Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mohammad Jawad Zawulistani, Farheen Meraj, Sahba Behrooz Mirahmadi, Ella Rose Keogh, and Sydney Phillips for their assistance with the evaluation. Mohammad Jawad Zawulistani and Farheen Meraj played an important role in completing the surveys with newcomers as well as the interviews with newcomers and settlement staff. Sydney Phillips also contributed by completing some of the surveys with newcomers. Sahba Behrooz Mirahmadi and Ella Rose Keogh provided support with the transcription and analysis of the interview notes, and Sahba additionally assisted with the development of the demographic profiles of the newcomers and volunteers in the study. We are very grateful to the newcomer participants, volunteers, and service providers for their time and contributions to the project. Last but not least, we greatly appreciate the continual support from Andrew Luszyk, Anna Hill, and Ahmed Barbour throughout the project.

## Executive Summary

As part of the project “Leveraging Technology to Connect Volunteers with Government-Assisted Refugees and Protected Persons for Social Support” (X229716011), the purpose of this report is to present the findings from the evaluation of the Welcome Group Program, assessing its effectiveness and efficiency in supporting refugee newcomers in Canada. The program aims to provide tailored social and integration support to government-assisted refugees, protected persons, and Ukrainian CUAET arrivals by matching them with "Welcome Groups" of 3-5 volunteers for a six-month period. Newcomers and volunteers have the choice to participate in remote or hybrid (combination of remote and in-person) matches.

The goals of the evaluation were to determine if the two support models (remote versus hybrid) meet the program’s expected outcomes for refugee newcomers – such as improved access to services, enhanced social connections, stronger community ties, and more informed decision-making – and to identify which support model best serves different newcomer groups under various circumstances. Additionally, the evaluation explored how newcomers, volunteers and settlement staff perceive the effectiveness and efficiency of these models, explored which technologies best facilitate the intended outcomes, and assessed the program impact on settlement service delivery.

The methodology included quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Surveys were administered to newcomers at three time points – before, at the middle, and after the program – and to volunteers at the start and end of the program. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected newcomers three months after the program, as well as with settlement staff from the three partner organizations – COSTI Immigrant Services, the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, and the DIVERSEcity Community Resources Centre – to gain insights into their experiences with the program.

Between March 24, 2022, and March 28, 2024, 70 newcomers completed at least two of the three surveys and 35 volunteers completed at least one of the two surveys. In addition, 11 newcomers and 8 settlement staff completed the qualitative interviews. The results showed that the program achieved its intended outcomes, significantly enhancing newcomers' access to services and resources, especially in remote matches where initial access was limited. Newcomers in both remote and hybrid matches reported having someone to talk to about their problems, feeling more connected to their communities, and experiencing reduced social isolation. They also noted progress in meeting their integration priorities. Although outcomes were generally similar across match types, over time hybrid match newcomers significantly improved in having people who support them in the community, social connections and their ability to make informed decisions about their life in Canada, unlike remote match newcomers. Furthermore, the program had positive effects on volunteers and the broader community. Volunteers in both match types reported personal growth, with those in hybrid matches especially noting a significant impact on newcomers' transition to life in Canada, contributing to more integrated and welcoming communities.

The hybrid support model was generally perceived as more effective and recognized for its flexibility, allowing newcomers and volunteers to choose the most suitable interaction method based on individual preferences, needs and circumstances. While in-person interactions were rated as very effective, remote interactions were appreciated for their efficiency. Hybrid models also improved the effectiveness of the most frequently used communication technologies within the program. Messaging platforms such as

WhatsApp, video calls and phone calls were generally considered as more effective in hybrid matches than in remote matches. Other technologies such as text messages and emails were less frequently used and showed mixed results in terms of their effectiveness. Remote interactions were particularly useful for those balancing work and family commitments or facing geographic and transportation challenges, as they minimized the need to travel. On the other hand, in-person interactions were ideal for newcomers with low English language proficiency or limited technology skills. In-person interactions were also particularly effective in addressing specific challenges, such as healthcare navigation, addressing important paperwork, or attending appointments.

Settlement staff reported that the Welcome Group Program effectively improved their capacity to offer responsive and coordinated services through its well-organized structure, supportive collaboration, and the dedication of its volunteers. However, the perception of the program's efficiency was varied. While staff members valued the reduction in direct client interactions and appreciated the quick responses from volunteers that lightened their workload, they also expressed some concerns. Staff members mentioned increased coordination needs and the potential of duplication of efforts, especially when volunteers addressed issues already being handled by caseworkers.

The results of the evaluation suggest several recommendations for improving the Welcome Group Program. Post-match interviews with newcomers revealed that some matches experienced a decrease in meeting frequency over time, suggesting that the program could adopt a more flexible approach to the duration of matches, tailored to the changing needs of the newcomers. In addition, settlement staff provided several suggestions for improvement. In particular, they recommended that the communication and coordination between caseworkers and volunteers be improved to ensure that all parties are updated on ongoing efforts and prevent service duplication. Furthermore, clear definitions and communication of roles and expectations for caseworkers and volunteers were also mentioned by settlement staff in order to maintain professional boundaries and manage expectations effectively. They also recommended expanding the volunteer pool to include more individuals who speak the clients' languages, which could reduce the wait times between onboarding and match start, improving newcomer engagement and satisfaction with the program. Another topic mentioned by settlement staff was the importance of providing volunteer support, particularly for volunteers handling complex cases or mental health challenges. Finally, settlement staff also suggested increasing awareness about the program among newcomers by distributing multilingual flyers soon after their arrival.

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## Purpose

The primary aim of this report is to share the findings from the evaluation of the Welcome Group Program, focusing on its effectiveness and efficiency in supporting refugee newcomers in Canada.

The Welcome Group Program is designed to provide social and integration support to refugee newcomers. Many refugee newcomers face difficulties in learning about and accessing settlement services as well as in establishing social connections in their new community. In order for refugee newcomers to optimally benefit from these services, to build a supportive social network, and to promote community involvement in newcomer integration, the Welcome Group Program matches “Welcome Groups” – groups of 3-5 volunteers – with government-assisted refugees (GARs), protected persons and Ukrainian CUAET arrivals for six months. During this time, the volunteers provide personalized social and integration support based on the unique needs and priorities of each newcomer household.

To maximize success, the matching process considers the volunteers’ and newcomers’ shared interests, the newcomers’ needs and the volunteers’ experience and skills. Furthermore, the Welcome Group Program provides newcomers and volunteers the flexibility to receive and provide support through either a remote or hybrid model. In the remote support model, refugee newcomers and volunteers meet entirely or almost entirely remotely. In the hybrid support model, refugee newcomers and volunteers meet through a combination of in-person and remote interactions.

The Welcome Group Program is delivered in partnership with three settlement agencies – COSTI Immigrant Services in the Greater Toronto Area, the Catholic Centre for Immigrants in Ottawa, and the DIVERSEcity Community Resources Centre in Surrey – which refer clients to the Welcome Group Program. In addition, TD Bank has been a partner by providing volunteer support.

This report evaluates the outcomes of the Welcome Group Program, specifically comparing the remote and hybrid support models to understand their effectiveness and efficiency. The evaluation aimed to answer the following research questions:

- Does the program achieve its expected outcomes for refugee newcomers, such as greater access to services, social connections, community attachment and participation, and ability to make more informed decisions about life in Canada?
- How do refugee newcomers, volunteers and settlement staff perceive the efficiency and effectiveness of the remote and hybrid support models in meeting the needs of newcomer households?
- What existing technologies are most effective in delivering the program's intended outcomes for newcomers, such as phone calls, digital messaging platforms, or video calls?
- Which newcomer client groups are best suited to benefit from the remote or hybrid support models?
- Under what circumstances do these client groups benefit most from each model?
- How efficient and effective is the program in supporting the delivery of settlement services?

## Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the Welcome Group Program adopted a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather a broad spectrum of data. To minimize bias and to maximize potential for capturing knowledge, converging lines of evidence were sought by collecting data from newcomers, volunteers and settlement staff.

Newcomers participated in surveys at three time points: before starting the program, at the three-month midpoint, and at the conclusion of the six-month period. In cases involving multiple newcomers from a single household, one representative was selected to complete the surveys to ensure consistency and reduce the time commitment on households. The survey questions for newcomers covered a broad range of topics including their specific integration challenges, ability to access and understand services and resources, and the level of perceived social support. The questions also assessed the progress their households made toward their integration priorities, their attachment to and participation in the community, their social integration, and their ability to make informed decisions. Additionally, questions addressed the meeting format with the volunteers, their views on the effectiveness and efficiency of both remote and in-person interactions, and the types of technology used for remote interactions. The surveys also explored newcomers' internet access, their confidence with using technology, and overall satisfaction with the program.

Volunteers were surveyed at the beginning and end of their matches. The baseline survey focused on their initial expectations about the volunteer experience, their perceived readiness to support newcomer households, and demographic information. The end-of-match survey assessed outcomes for volunteers such as the knowledge volunteers gained through their participation, the impact they perceived on both the communities and the lives of newcomers, and the extent of social connections they formed. Additional questions explored the nature of their meetings with the newcomers, including the reasons for these interactions, and evaluated their perspectives on the effectiveness and efficiency of remote and in-person interactions. Volunteers also provided feedback on the support they received from the Together Project and reported their overall satisfaction with their experience.

Qualitative data was obtained from interviews conducted with randomly selected newcomers three months post-match and settlement staff from the three partner organizations, COSTI Immigrant Services, the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, and the DIVERSEcity Community Resources Centre. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured and aimed to delve deeper into the individual experiences and perceptions of the program's impact.

Interview questions for newcomers asked about their initial expectations and their experiences, including the nature of their interactions with volunteers, such as the format, frequency, and whether ongoing contact was maintained. Questions also assessed the type of support received, the program's impact on their family, and their levels of social integration and community participation. The effectiveness and efficiency of remote and hybrid interactions, suggestions for program improvements, and overall satisfaction were also explored. Interview questions for settlement staff focused on their experience with the program, its impact on their work, its effectiveness, and the suitability of remote and hybrid support

models. Staff were also asked to assess their overall satisfaction with the program and suggest areas for improvement.

The findings in this report are based on surveys completed by 70 newcomers who completed at least two of the three surveys. Of these 70 newcomers, 57.1% (n = 40) were matched in the Greater Toronto Area, 32.9% (n = 23) in Surrey, and 10% (n = 7) in Ottawa. In addition, 11 randomly selected newcomers completed the post-match survey. The report also includes data from 35 volunteers. These volunteers completed either one or both surveys. Finally, the report also includes the findings from 8 interviews with settlement staff, who were recruited from the three partner organizations.

Overall, the evaluation proceeded as expected, but there were a few challenges. One challenge encountered early in the evaluation was ensuring that newcomers fully understood the survey instructions and the terminology used. To address this issue, we adopted a strategy of verbally administering the surveys via Zoom or phone, with the assistance of an interpreter when needed. Additionally, we refined the instructions and established a set of standardized responses to clarify any questions that newcomers had. Furthermore, the project aimed to establish 145 matches, expecting most participants to complete the study. However, the project did not reach its target due to fewer referrals from partners and various challenges that affected survey completion among newcomers. Participant time constraints led to a lower completion rate, and the limited availability or absence of interpreters caused delays in survey completion. Furthermore, some matches ended prematurely, and a few started too late to undergo the full six-month period prior to the evaluation completion. The lower sample size limited our ability for a detailed analysis by demographic characteristics and other variables such as language proficiency, proximity to volunteers, and digital access.

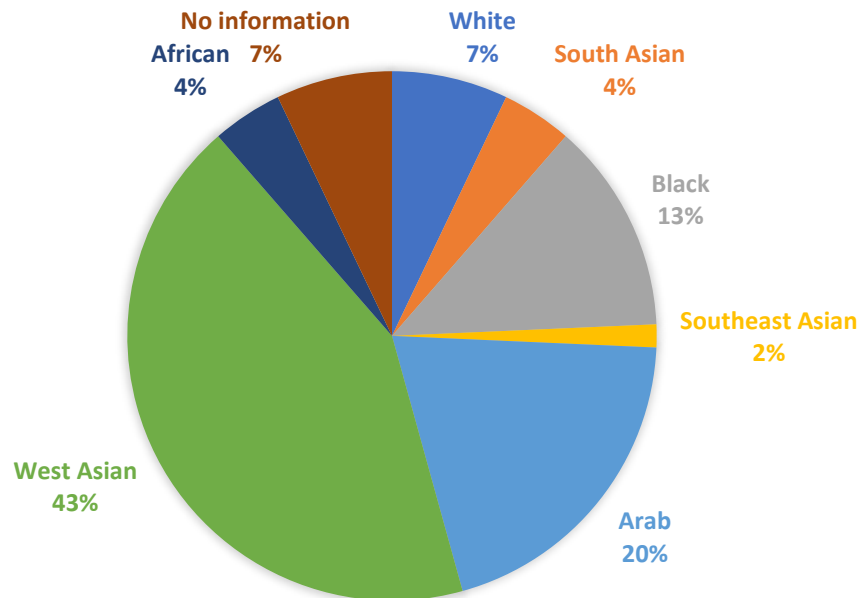


# Demographic Profiles

## Newcomers

The average age of the newcomers was 37.8 years old ( $SD = 9.3$  years). In terms of their gender, 27 (38.6%) were men and 43 (61.4%) were women. In terms of their ethnicity, many of the newcomers identified as West Asian ( $n = 30$ ) or Arab ( $n = 14$ , see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ethnicity of Newcomers ( $n = 70$ )



The most commonly reported countries of birth were Afghanistan (42.9%,  $n = 30$ ) and Syria (15.7%,  $n = 11$ ). Other countries of birth included the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine (7.1%,  $n = 5$  each), Sudan (5.7%,  $n = 4$ ), Pakistan, and Eritrea (2.9%,  $n = 2$  each). Only one newcomer (1.4%) was from either India, Burundi, Central African Republic, Iraq, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Vietnam, Yemen, Mali, and Palestine.

Newcomers who did not live in their birth country before arriving in Canada were asked to indicate the most recent country they had stayed in. Among the 44 newcomers who reported another country than their birth country, the most frequently cited countries were Pakistan and Lebanon (13.6%,  $n = 6$  each). This was followed by Uganda (11.4%,  $n = 5$ ) and Turkey (6.8%,  $n = 3$ ). The following countries were mentioned by two newcomers each (4.5% each): Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Malaysia, Niger, and Thailand; and the following countries were mentioned by one newcomer each (2.3% each): Cameroon, Georgia, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, North Macedonia, Poland, Tanzania, and UAE.

Most of the newcomers entered Canada as government assisted refugees (90%,  $n = 63$ ). Only two newcomers were protected persons (2.9%) and five arrived through the Canada–Ukraine authorization for emergency travel program (7.1%). In terms of their length of time in Canada<sup>1</sup>, the average length of

<sup>1</sup> The length of time refers to how long newcomers have lived in Canada as of May 2024.

time in Canada was approximately 2 years (SD = 1 year). The most recent newcomer had been in Canada for 10 months and the newcomer who had been in Canada for the longest time had been in Canada for approximately 6 years.

Newcomers were also asked to list all the family members who came with them to Canada (multiple selections were possible). One in five newcomers came to Canada with their mother (20%, n = 14), 10% came with their father (n = 7), 2.9% came with their grandparents (n = 2), 24.3% came with their siblings (n = 17), 67.1% came with their children (n = 47), 50% came with their partners (n = 35), and 8.6% came alone (n = 6). 7.1% of the newcomers selected other (n = 5; i.e. aunts, in laws, nieces, and nephews).

Most of the newcomers were either married (50%, n = 35) or single (22.9%, n = 16). Two newcomers were widowed (1.4%, n = 1) and divorced (1.4%, n = 1); and 17 newcomers did not report their marital status (24.3%).

The average household size was 4.9 people (SD = 2.6). The smallest household included one person, and the largest household included 11 individuals. Fifty-one households had children (72.9%), with an average number of children of 3.2 (SD = 1.8). The minimum number of children was one and the maximum was seven. In terms of the children's ages, of the 51 households with children, 80.4% had children aged 17 years or less (n = 41).

Newcomers also reported all the family members they were living with at the start of the program (multiple selections were possible). Thirteen newcomers lived with their mother (18.6%), seven with their father (10%), one with their stepfather (1.4%), two with their grandparents (2.9%), 16 with their siblings (22.9%), 47 with their children (67.1%), 33 with their partners (47.1%), one with their friends or roommate (1.4%), five alone (7.1%), and five with other individuals (7.1% i.e. in-laws, aunts, nephews or nieces;).

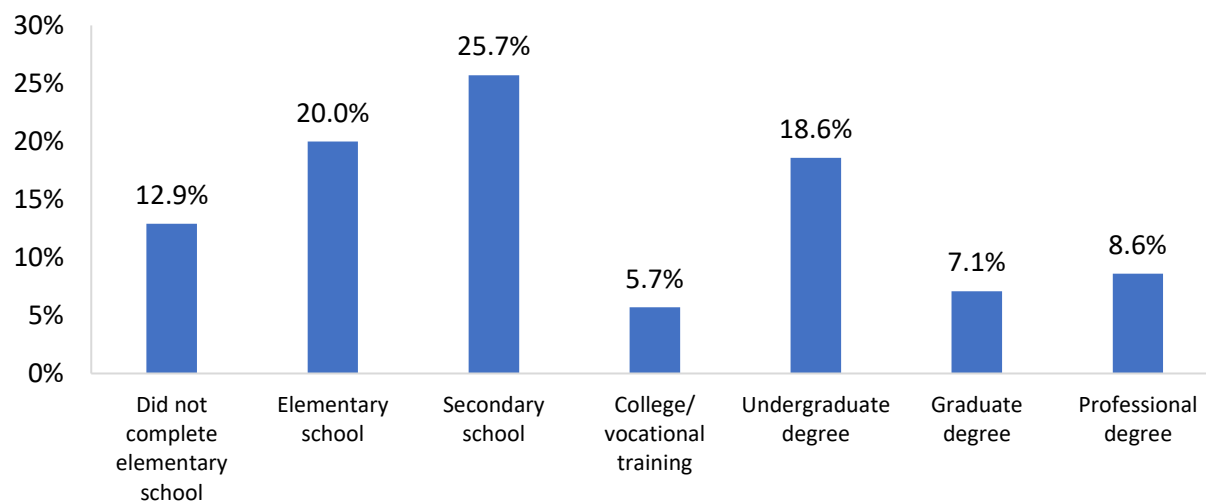
As shown in Table 1, the most commonly reported preferred languages at home before arrival in Canada were Arabic, Dari (n = 18, 25.7% each), and Pashto (n = 12, 17.1%). The English language ability among the newcomers was varied. Many had a basic (CLB 1-2) ability (n = 24, 34.3%). Nineteen had an intermediate ability (CLB 3-5; 27.1%), 15 had an advanced ability (CLB 6-12; 21.4%), 10 had no ability (14.3%), and two were fluent (2.9%). In regards to French, the majority reported no French language ability (n = 67, 95.7%). Two reported an intermediate ability (CLB 3-5, 2.9%), and one reported being fluent (1.4%).

Table 1. Preferred Language before Arrival in Canada (n = 70)

Preferred Language	Frequency	Percent
Arabic	18	25.7 %
Dari	18	25.7 %
Pashto	12	17.1 %
Swahili	6	8.6 %
Ukrainian	5	7.1 %
French	2	2.9 %
Urdu	2	2.9 %
Tigrinya	2	2.9 %
Kirundi	1	1.4 %
Luganda	1	1.4 %
Punjabi	1	1.4 %
Somali	1	1.4 %
Vietnamese	1	1.4 %

Newcomers' education levels were varied. Nine newcomers did not complete elementary school (12.9%), 14 completed elementary school (20%), and 18 completed secondary school (25.7%). Four completed college/vocational training (5.7%) and thirteen completed a university undergraduate degree (18.6%). The rest completed a university graduate degree (7.1%, n = 5) or a professional degree (8.6%, n = 6). One newcomer's highest education level is unknown.

Figure 2. Newcomers' Highest Level of Education (n = 70)



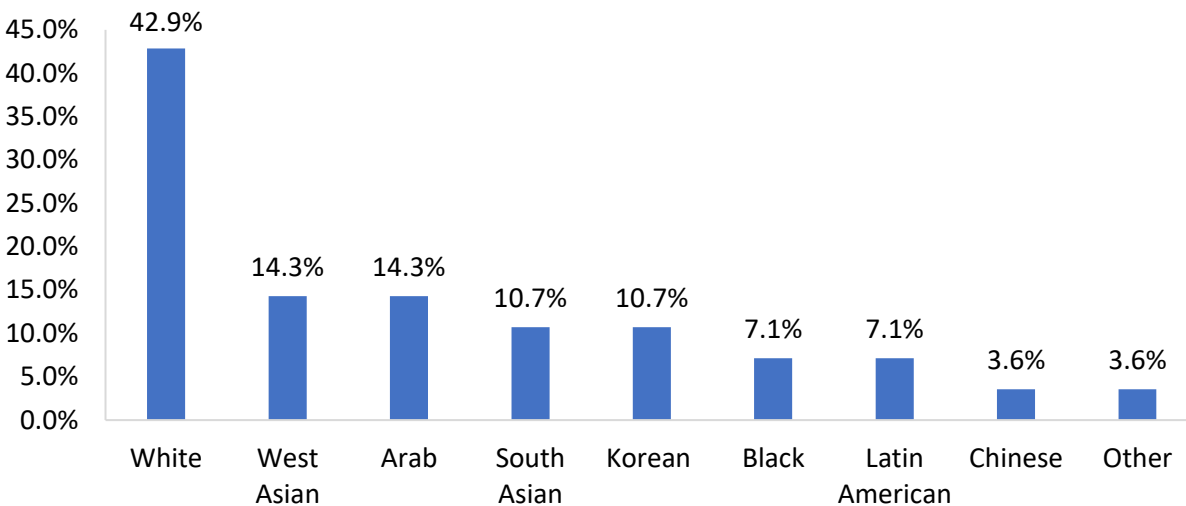
*Note.* One newcomer did not report their highest level of education.

Finally, of the 70 households, 16 had members with special physical or mental health needs (22.9%). In particular, three had mental health needs (4.3%), 10 had physical health needs (14.3%), and three had both physical and mental health needs (4.3%).

## Volunteers

Of the 35 volunteers included in the evaluation study, only 23 volunteers shared their age. The average age of these volunteers was 44.8 years old (SD = 15.1). In terms of their gender and ethnicity, 28 volunteers provided this information. Seventeen were women (60.7%) and 11 were men (39.3%); and many identified as White (n = 12, 42.9%). Other ethnicities mentioned included West Asian, Arab (n = 4, 14.3% each), South Asian, and Korean (n = 3, 10.7% each). Moreover, two volunteers identified as Black (7.1%), two as Latin American (7.1%), and one as Chinese (3.6%). One volunteer stated that they were Armenian but born in the Middle East (3.6%).

Figure 3. Ethnicity of Volunteers (n = 28; multiple selections were possible)



Of the 28 volunteers who reported their country of birth, 42.9% were born in Canada (n = 12). The rest (n = 16, 57.1%) were born in Egypt, Pakistan (n = 2, 7.1% each), Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Switzerland, and Sri Lanka (n = 1, 6.3% each). These volunteers entered Canada under various immigration categories, including as a resettled refugee (n = 5, 31.3%), family class (n = 3, 18.8%), or economic class (n = 4, 25.0%). The other volunteers who were not born in Canada selected another immigration category or 'don't know' (n = 2, 12.5% each). In terms of the length of time in Canada, there was quite a bit of variation among the 16 volunteers who were not born in Canada. The average length of time in Canada was approximately 14 years (SD = 11 years). The volunteer who most recently moved to Canada had been in Canada for one year. The volunteer who had lived the longest in Canada had been in Canada for 38 years.

Volunteers had varied marital statuses. Of the 28 volunteers who reported their marital status, 12 were married (42.9%), 10 were single (i.e. never married; 35.7%), 3 were in a common-law relationship, and 3 were separated (10.7%).

Moreover, 27 volunteers provided information about their household size. The average household size was 3.6 (SD = 2.1). The smallest household included one person, and the largest household included 11 individuals. The family members within each household varied. Out of the 28 volunteers who reported whom they were living with, six lived with their mother (21.4%), four with their father (14.3%), four with

their siblings (14.3%), ten with their children (35.7%), fifteen with their partner (53.6%), three with roommates (10.7%), and one with their father and mother-in-law (3.6%; multiple selections were possible).

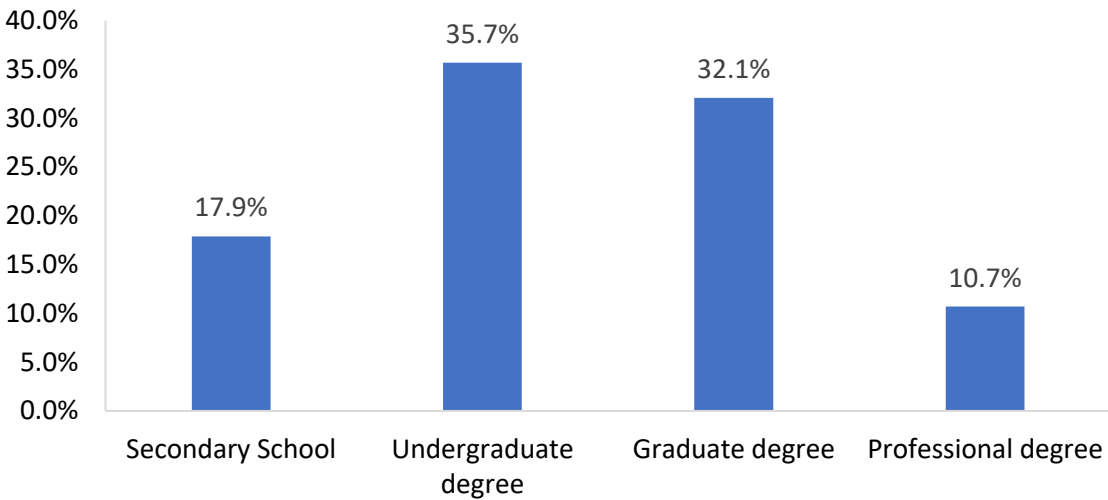
Twenty-four volunteers reported their English language ability. The majority of these volunteers were fluent (n = 17, 70.8%), and seven had an advanced ability (CLB 6-12; 29.2%). In regards to French, 23 volunteers reported their language abilities. Many had no French language ability (n = 10, 43.5%), five had an intermediate ability (CLB 3-5; 21.7%), four had a basic ability (CLB 1-2; 17.4%), three had an advanced ability (CLB 6-12; 13%), and one was fluent (4.3%). Furthermore, 21 volunteers reported the ability to speak other languages. As shown in Table 3, the other language most commonly spoken by the volunteers was Arabic (n = 7, 33.3%).

Table 2. Volunteers' Spoken Languages Other Than English (n = 21; multiple languages could be mentioned)

Spoken Language	Frequency	Percent
Arabic	7	33.3 %
Farsi	3	14.3 %
Pashto	3	14.3 %
Dari	3	14.3 %
Urdu	3	14.3 %
Italian	3	14.3 %
Spanish	2	9.5 %
Armenian	1	4.8 %
French	1	4.8 %
Hindi	1	4.8 %
Japanese	1	4.8 %
Korean	1	4.8 %
Mandarin	1	4.8 %
Tamil	1	4.8 %

Twenty-eight volunteers provided information about their education level and employment status. In terms of their highest education level, 10 completed an undergraduate degree (35.7%), nine completed a graduate degree (32.1%), five completed secondary school (17.9%), and three completed a professional degree (10.7%). One volunteer selected 'other' because the volunteer was currently pursuing an undergraduate degree (3.6%).

Figure 4. Volunteers' Highest Level of Education ( $n = 28$ )



In terms of their employment status, five were self-employed or owned their business (17.9%), five were students (17.9%), three were unemployed and looking for work (10.7%), and one was retired (3.6%). Moreover, 15 were employed full-time (53.6%) and two were employed part-time (7.1%). Of these, 13 volunteers reported their occupation, which included an assessment processing officer, biomedical & software engineer, chiropractic assistant, commercial property manager, federal public servant, global accounts director, lawyer, owner of video production company, writer/ director/ actor, realtor, registered clinical counsellor, social media specialist, and university professor.

Finally, volunteers were also asked if they had been matched before and how they had heard about Together Project. Of the 28 volunteers who responded about their match history, seven had had a past match (25%) and 21 had no previous match experience (75%). Twenty-two volunteers reported how they had heard about the Together Project, of which the majority found it through a web search (40.9%,  $n = 9$ ) or a referral by a partner organization ( $n = 8$ , 36.4%). Others found out about Together Project through word-of-mouth (9.1%,  $n = 2$ ), a volunteering site, being approached by Together Project, or through a referral from another volunteer (4.5%,  $n = 1$  each).

# Findings

## Newcomer Survey Data

### 1. Reasons for Chosen Match Type

The findings from the newcomer survey data are broken down by match type. To assess newcomers' match types, newcomers were asked to indicate how they had been meeting with the volunteers both at the mid-point and end of the program. Based on their answers, newcomers were categorized as participating in either a 'remote' or a 'hybrid' match. Remote matches were defined as matches where newcomers met entirely or almost entirely remotely. Hybrid matches were defined as matches where newcomers met through a combination of remote and in-person meetings.

Newcomers were also asked to explain the reasons for their chosen meeting format. Preference, convenience and availability were frequently mentioned, as remote meetings better accommodated newcomers' busy lives, including their work and family responsibilities. Furthermore, the geographic distances between them and the volunteers were often too large, making remote meetings more convenient. Additionally, newcomers reported that volunteers had busy lives too, making them unavailable for in-person meetings, and some volunteers did not actively request such meetings. A lack of confidence to ask for in-person interactions was also mentioned by some newcomers. Health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 were further reasons for preferring remote interactions. Finally, a few stated there was no specific reason for the remote nature of the meetings. Despite these factors, several newcomers in remote matches also expressed openness to in-person meetings, willing to adapt if circumstances allowed more in-person interactions.

Newcomers in hybrid matches provided similar reasons for their remote interactions, such as their efficiency and convenience in dealing with large geographic distances, busy schedules, and family and work commitments among newcomers and volunteers. For some, concerns related to COVID-19 also played a role in choosing more remote interactions. In terms of reasons for in-person interactions, newcomers reported that some volunteers asked for in-person meetings. Newcomers also explained that in-person meetings were particularly effective to build deeper connections and to address specific challenges such as navigating language barriers, seeking housing, handling important paperwork, and receiving emotional and mental health support. Moreover, newcomers also valued the flexibility of the hybrid model, allowing them to choose between the two meeting formats depending on their specific needs, circumstances and availability.

### 2. Outcomes

This section presents the results of the indicators used to assess the immediate and intermediate outcomes outlined in the performance measurement framework (PMF). Newcomers expressed their level of agreement with each indicator on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To analyze changes over time within remote and hybrid matches, we grouped responses into three categories: 'strongly disagree/disagree,' 'neither agree nor disagree,' and 'agree/strongly agree.' However, for ease of interpretation, the graphs in this section show the percentages of newcomers who strongly

agreed/agreed, broken down by match type and time point. In the following pages, we will first report the findings for the immediate outcomes and then the intermediate outcomes.

## 2.1. Immediate Outcomes

Immediate outcomes were assessed at the mid-point of the matches using survey data from 61 clients, of which 29 were in remote matches and 32 in hybrid matches<sup>2</sup>. Progress over time was assessed through comparisons with baseline, assessed at the program's start. As indicated in the performance measurement framework, the targets for the indicators were set at 30% at baseline and 50% at the 3-month mark. With only a few exceptions, these targets were met and surpassed.

### Immediate Outcome 1: Increased Understanding of Client Settlement Needs and Appropriate Linkages to Other Services

The first expected immediate outcome of the project was an increased understanding of clients' settlement needs and the appropriate linkages to other services. To assess this outcome, the evaluation focused on the following three indicators:

- Clients' perception that they have someone to talk to about their problems
- Clients' level of understanding and access to available services and resources
- Percentage of clients who report that their settlement needs are being met

#### *Clients' Perception That They Have Someone to Talk to About Their Problems*

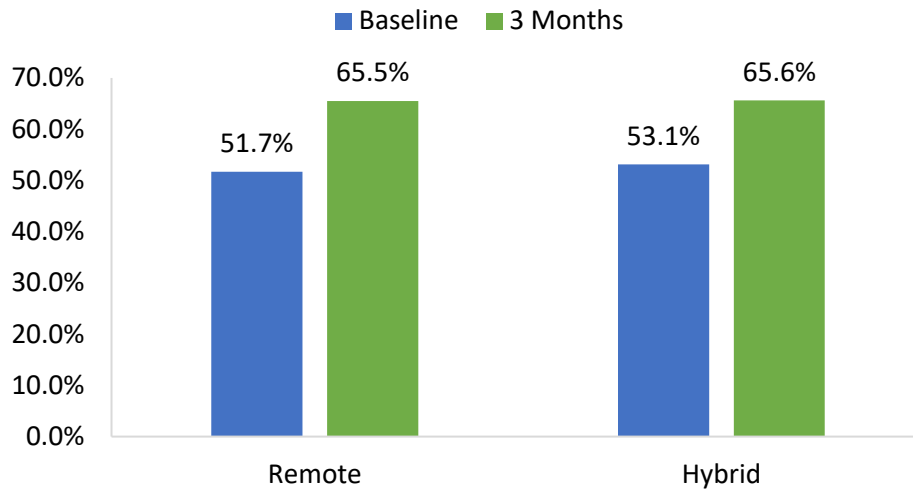
For newcomers in both remote and hybrid matches, while not statistically significant, the results revealed a positive trend in newcomers' perception that they have someone to talk to about problems they were facing (see Figure 5). At the 3-month mark, 65.5% of newcomers in remote matches reported having someone to talk to, up from 51.7% at baseline. Similarly, in hybrid matches, the percentage increased from 53.1% at baseline to 65.6% after three months.

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<sup>2</sup> The newcomers in hybrid matches included in the assessment of immediate outcomes (a comparison between the baseline data and the data at the 3-month mark) had varying ratios of in-person and remote interactions, with most of them indicating that they met mostly remotely with some in-person interactions (n = 21). The remaining clients reported meeting either 'equally in person and remotely' (n = 6), 'mostly in person, some remotely' (n = 3) and 'entirely or almost entirely in person' (n = 2).

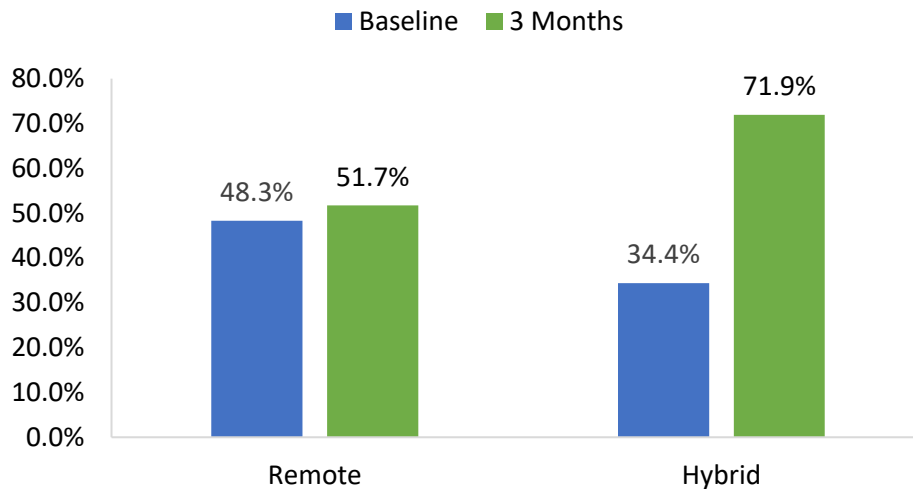


Figure 5. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Someone to Talk to about Problems They are Facing: Baseline versus 3 Months



In terms of having people who support them in their community, the percentage of newcomers in remote matches who agreed or strongly agreed showed a minimal increase from 48.3% at baseline to 51.7% at the 3-month mark; however, the change in the response distribution was not statistically significant (see Figure 6). In contrast, for hybrid matches, there was a significant increase in support perception, with 34.4% feeling supported at baseline compared to 71.9% after three months.

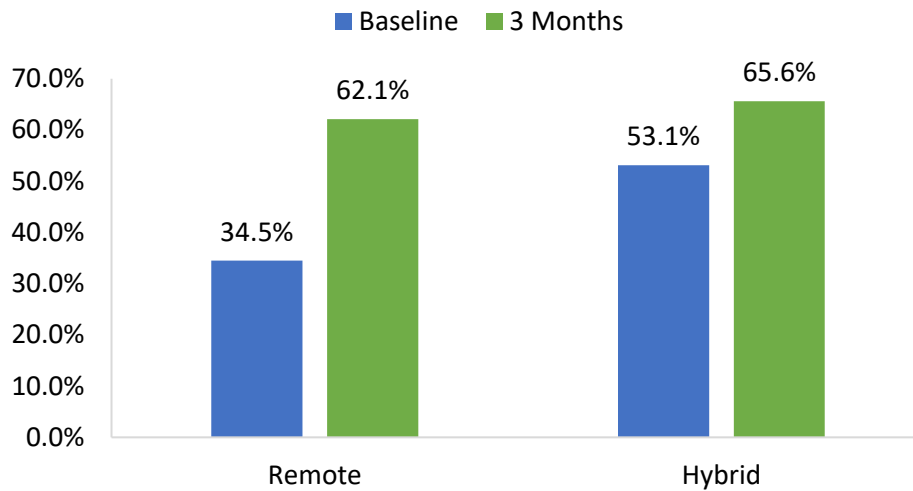
Figure 6. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have People Who Support Them in their Community: Baseline versus 3 Months



*Clients' Level of Understanding and Access to Available Services and Resources*

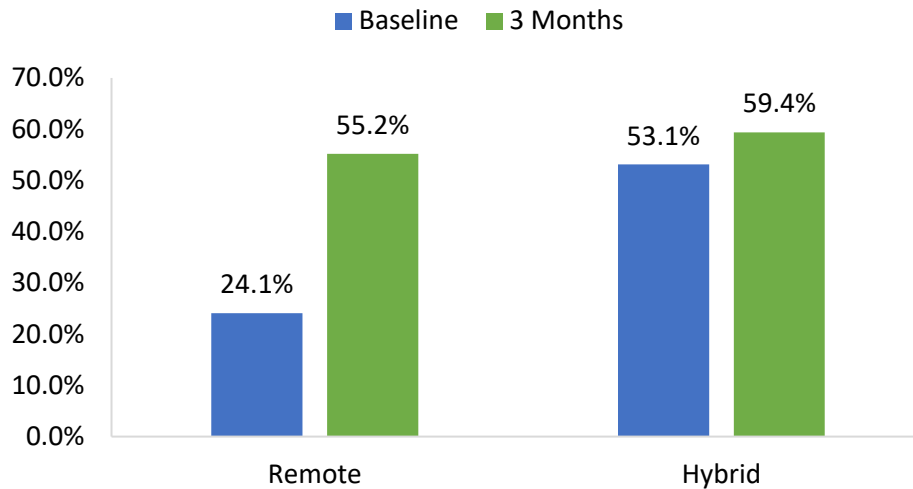
For remote matches, there was a significant improvement in newcomers' perception that they can access the services they need in Canada, with the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing rising from 34.5% at baseline to 62.1% at the 3-month mark (see Figure 7). In hybrid matches, while not significant, the results suggested a positive trend. At baseline, 53.1% of newcomers in hybrid matches agreed or strongly agreed that they can access the services they need. At 3 months, this percentage increased to 65.6%.

Figure 7. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Access the Services They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 3 Months



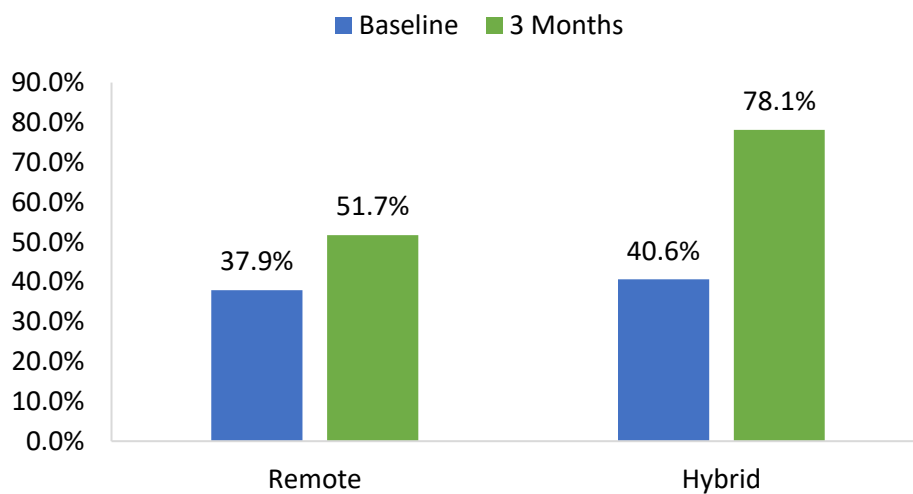
Similarly, in terms of access to resources, the responses of newcomers in remote matches revealed a significant, positive change. The percentage of newcomers in remote matches who agreed or strongly agreed that they can access the resources they need in Canada increased from 24.1% at baseline to 55.2% at the three-month mark (see Figure 8). For newcomers in hybrid matches, while not significant, the results also revealed a positive upward trend, from 53.1% to 59.4%. Notably, the initial percentages of agreement differed significantly between the two match types, with hybrid matches starting from a higher baseline.

Figure 8. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Access the Resources They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 3 Months



In contrast, when asked about their ability to access and understand information they need in Canada, newcomers in hybrid matches reported a significant positive shift. The percentage of newcomers in hybrid matches who agreed or strongly agreed rose from 40.6% at baseline to 78.1% at the three-month mark (see Figure 9). In remote matches, although not significant, there was a positive trend as well, with the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing increasing from 37.9% to 51.7%. Of note, at 3 months, newcomers in hybrid matches were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree that they can access and understand the information they need in Canada compared to newcomers in remote matches.

Figure 9. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Access and Understand the Information They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 3 Months



*Percentage of Clients who Report that Their Settlement Needs Are Being Met*

At 3 months, newcomers in remote matches identified a total 163 challenges that they wanted help with from the volunteers (average 5.6/newcomer). Of these, 138 challenges were present since the start of the program, and 25 additional challenges were described as new challenges. Newcomers in hybrid matches reported a total of 155 challenges (average 4.8/newcomer), with 132 challenges present since the start of the program and 23 new challenges.

When asked about the top challenges they wanted help with since the start of the program, newcomers in both match types reported practicing English or French (remote: 82.8%, hybrid: 90.6%), accessing government services (remote: 79.3%, hybrid: 46.9%), and finding employment (remote: 69.0%, hybrid: 62.5%, see Table 3). Overall, the prevalence of the challenges encountered was similar across both match types, with the exception of ‘Accessing Government Services’. Newcomers in remote matches were significantly more likely to report this challenge than newcomers in hybrid matches.

Table 3. Challenges for which Newcomers in Remote and Hybrid Matches Wanted Help with Since the Start of the Program (Assessed at 3 Months)

Challenge	Remote	Hybrid
Practicing English or French	82.8%	90.6%
Finding Employment	69.0%	62.5%
Accessing Government Services	79.3%	46.9%
Pursuing Education	41.4%	43.8%
Socializing/Friendship with Volunteers	44.8%	28.1%
Seeing Doctors/Navigating Healthcare System	34.5%	34.4%
Helping Children with Schoolwork/Extracurriculars	37.9%	25.0%
Expanding Social Network	34.5%	28.1%
Accessing Settlement Services	24.1%	12.5%
Using Public Transit / Getting Around	6.9%	9.4%
Financial Literacy/Budgeting	3.4%	0.0%
Learning about my Neighbourhood	0.0%	0.0%
Other:	17.2%	31.3%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing (5 remote clients, 5 hybrid clients)</li> <li>• Youth Mentorship/Support (1 hybrid client)</li> <li>• Credential Recognition (1 hybrid client)</li> <li>• Interpretation (1 hybrid client)</li> <li>• Reunion with Family Member (1 hybrid client)</li> </ul>		

In terms of the new challenges that newcomers faced and sought help with after the start of the program, they mentioned issues such as finding employment, securing stable housing, and accessing financial support. They also needed help locating a family doctor or treating injuries. Others required assistance with legal matters or family reunification. Furthermore, they reported struggling to pursue educational opportunities while managing childcare responsibilities. Many newcomers needed support navigating

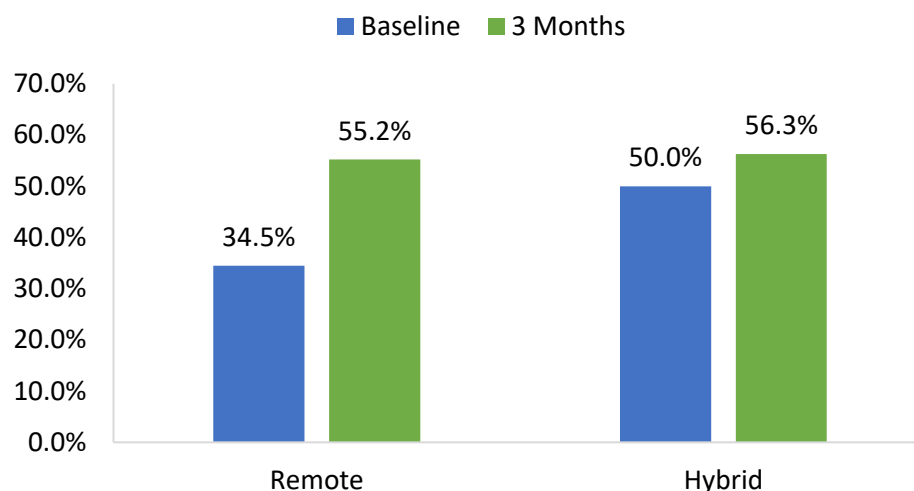
basic services like accessing the library or pool, obtaining a driver’s license, and finding affordable essentials such as winter clothes, furniture, and baby items.

Across all challenges, newcomers in hybrid matches reported receiving more help from the volunteers (M = 4.31) compared to newcomers in remote matches (M = 3.06) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal). When asked why they had not received help from the volunteers, newcomers in remote matches mentioned: a lack of in-person interaction for effective language practice and relationship building; insufficient meeting frequency; poor follow-up; difficulties navigating online resources due to inadequate guidance on how to use them; reluctance to request help from volunteers, fearing to bother them; and finding solutions elsewhere (e.g., caseworkers, friends). Newcomers in hybrid matches noted a lack of follow-up by volunteers, language barriers, complex needs and limited resources available to volunteers for effective support, and the presence of multiple concurrent problems and personal circumstances.

Newcomers were also asked to what extent their challenges were still an issue by providing ratings on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal). On average, newcomers in both remote (M = 4.22) and hybrid (M = 4.47) matches reported still facing challenges.

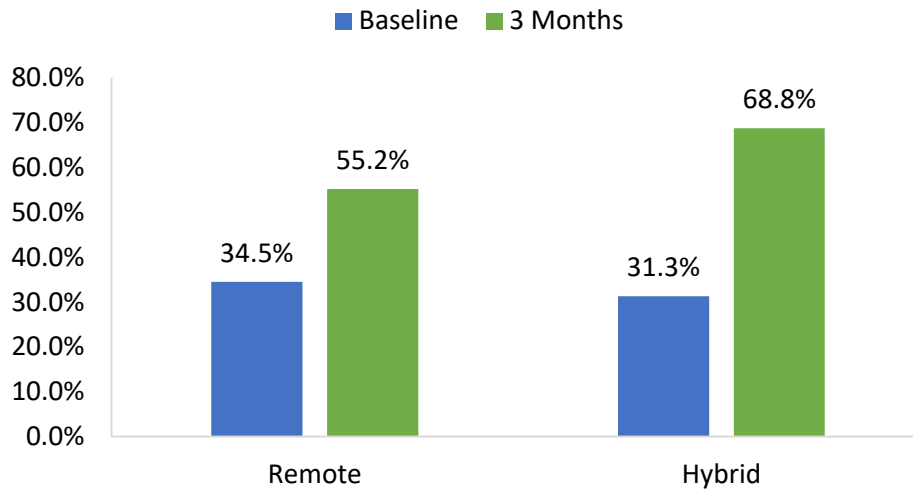
Similarly, newcomers were also asked to what extent their settlement needs were being met. While in both matches the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing that their settlement needs were being met increased from baseline to three months (remote: 34.5% to 55.2%, and hybrid: 50.0% to 56.3%), the distribution of responses showed no statistically significant changes over time for either match type (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that Their Settlement Needs are Being Met: Baseline versus 3 Months



However, when asked about their household’s progress toward their integration priorities, newcomers in both matches reported significant improvements (see Figure 11). In remote matches, the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing that their household had made progress toward their integration priorities increased from 34.5% at baseline to 55.2% at the three-month mark. Similarly, in hybrid matches, the percentage rose from 31.3% to 68.8%.

Figure 11. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that Their Household Has Made Progress Toward Their Integration Priorities: Baseline versus 3 Months



#### Immediate Outcome 2: Clients Increase Participation in Communities and Social Networks

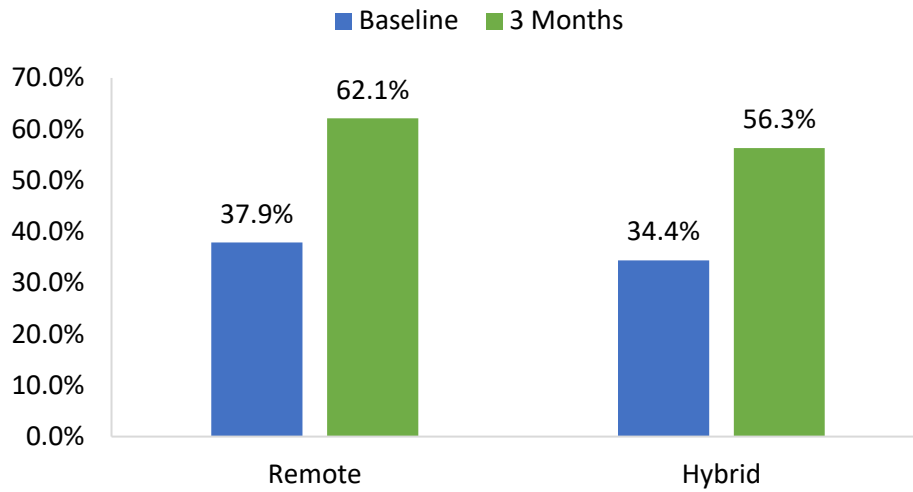
The second expected immediate outcome of the project was that clients increase their participation in communities and social networks. To assess this outcome, the evaluation focused on the following two indicators:

- Clients' level of attachment to their community
- Clients' participation and social integration in their community

#### *Clients' Level of Attachment to Their Community*

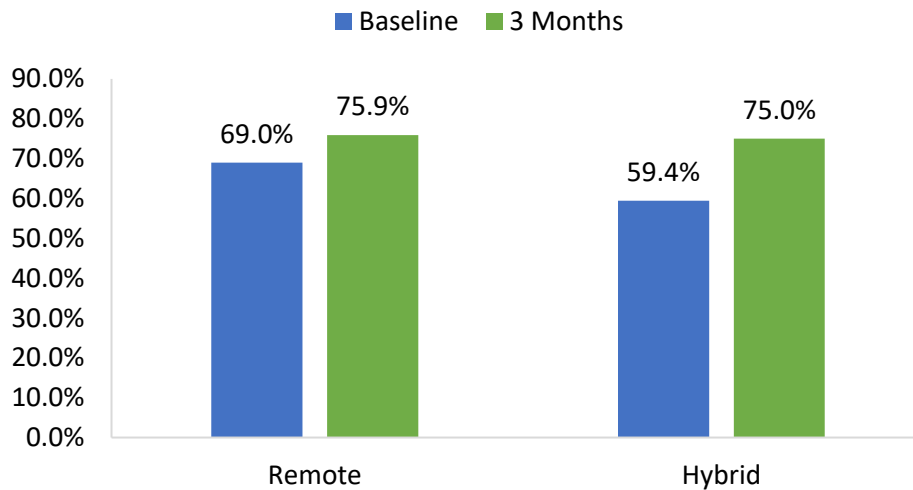
For newcomers in remote matches, the results showed a significant, positive shift in their feelings of connection to their community (see Figure 12). At the 3-month mark, 62.1% of newcomers in remote matches agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to their community, compared to 37.9% at baseline. The results for newcomers in hybrid matches, while not significant, followed the same trend. At the 3-month mark, 56.3% of newcomers in remote matches strongly agreed or agreed that they felt connected to their community, compared to 34.4% at baseline.

Figure 12. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Feel Connected to Their Community: Baseline versus 3 Months



However, when asked how welcomed newcomers felt, there was a different pattern of results. In both match types, the baseline level of agreement was already relatively high, indicating a strong initial sense of welcome (69.0% in remote matches, and 59.4% in hybrid matches, see Figure 13). At 3 months, approximately three quarters of newcomers in both match types agreed or strongly agreed that they felt welcome in their community (75.9% in remote matches, and 75.0% in hybrid matches). While the shift in the response distribution was not significant among remote matches, it was significant for hybrid matches.

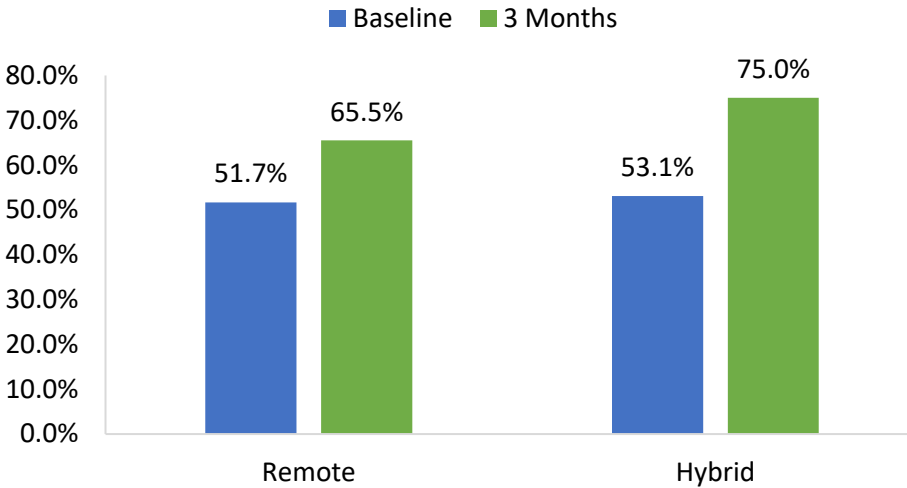
Figure 13. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Feel Welcome in Their Community: Baseline versus 3 Months



### *Clients' Participation and Social Integration in Their Community*

In remote matches, the percentage of newcomers who felt they could participate in their communities rose from 51.7% at baseline to 65.5% at three months. Similarly, in hybrid matches, there was an increase from 53.1% to 75.0%. However, these shifts in response distributions did not reach statistical significance in either match type (see Figure 14).

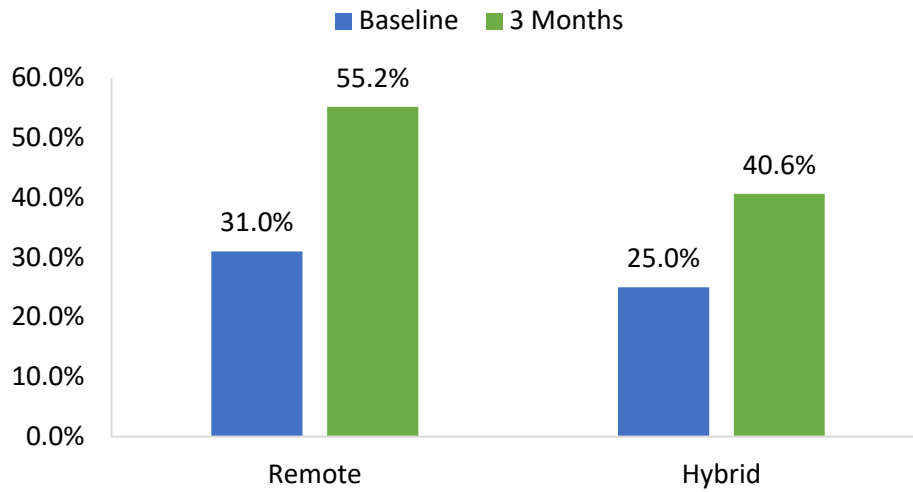
Figure 14. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Participate in Their Communities: Baseline versus 3 Months



In terms of newcomers' social integration, the responses among newcomers in remote matches revealed a statistically significant reduction in feelings of social isolation (see Figure 15). In particular, the percentage of newcomers in remote matches who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they feel socially isolated increased from 31.0% at baseline to 55.2% at three months. For newcomers in hybrid matches, the percentage also increased, from 25.0% to 40.6%, suggesting a trend towards less social isolation.

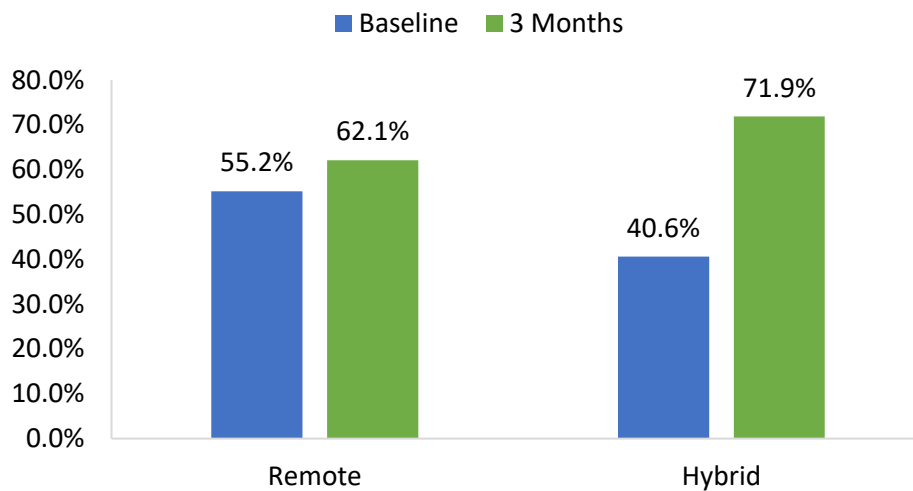


Figure 15. Percentage of Newcomers who Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed that They Feel Socially Isolated: Baseline versus 3 Months



The percentage of newcomers in remote matches who felt they had social connections in their community showed a small increase from 55.2% at baseline to 62.1% at three months; however, the change in the response distribution did not reach statistical significance (see Figure 16). In contrast, hybrid matches saw a significant enhancement in social connections, with agreement levels jumping from 40.6% to 71.9%.

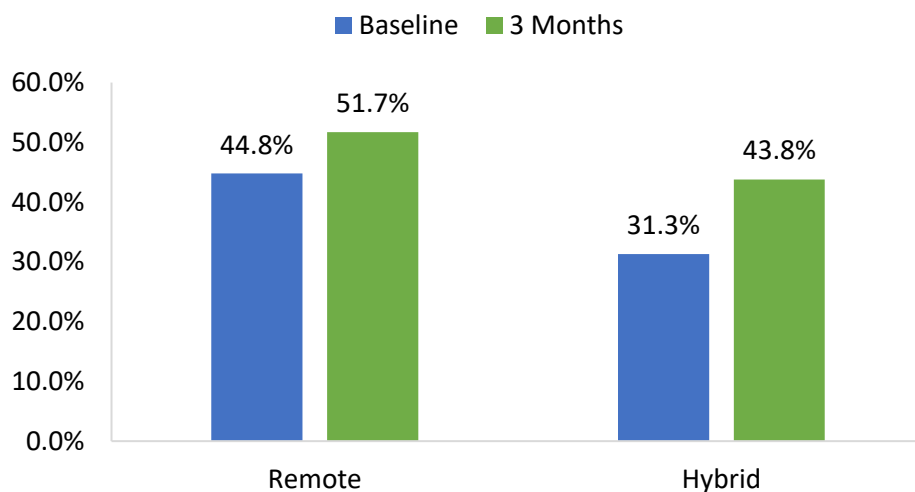
Figure 16. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Social Connections in Their Community: Baseline versus 3 Months



The results revealed a similar pattern for newcomers' perception that they had met people in their community who share their interests and enjoy the same social activities as them. Among newcomers in remote matches, the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing increased from 44.8% at baseline to 51.7% at three months, though the change in the distribution of responses did not reach statistical significance (see Figure 17). In contrast, in hybrid matches, the shift in response distribution was statistically

significant, with the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing increasing from 31.3% to 43.8%.

Figure 17. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Met People in Their Community who Share Their Interests and Enjoy the Same Social Activities as Them: Baseline versus 3 Months



## 2.2. Intermediate Outcomes

Intermediate outcomes were assessed at the end of the program using survey data from 41 clients, of whom 15 newcomers were in remote matches and 26 newcomers were in hybrid matches<sup>3</sup>. Progress over time was assessed through comparisons to baseline, assessed at the program’s start. As indicated in the performance measurement framework, the targets for these indicators were set at 30% at baseline and 75% at the 6-month mark. Although these targets were achieved for many indicators, there were some exceptions where the results nearly reached the intended target.

### Intermediate Outcome 1: Clients Make Informed Decisions about Life in Canada

The first intermediate outcome of the project was that clients make informed decisions about life in Canada. To assess this outcome, the evaluation focused on the following four indicators:

- Clients’ perception that they have someone to talk to about their problems
- Clients’ level of understanding and access to available services and resources

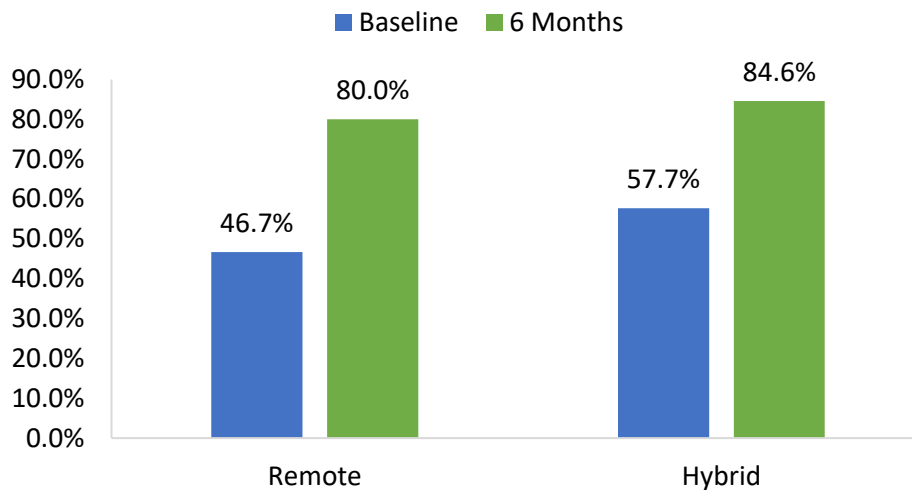
<sup>3</sup> The newcomers in hybrid matches included in the assessment of intermediate outcomes (a comparison between the baseline data and the data at the 6-month mark) had varying ratios of in-person and remote interactions, with many of them indicating that they met mostly remotely with some in-person interactions (n = 14). The remaining clients reported meeting either ‘equally in person and remotely’ (n = 3), and ‘mostly in person, some remotely’ (n = 2). In addition, 7 newcomers reported meeting entirely or almost entirely remotely in the last three months of their matches. However, because these newcomers had in-person interactions in the first three months – they indicated a hybrid meeting format at the 3-month mark – these newcomers were categorized as participating in hybrid matches.

- Percentage of clients who report that their settlement needs are being met
- Percentage of clients who report that they can make informed decisions about their life

*Clients' Perception that They Have Someone to Talk to about Their Problems*

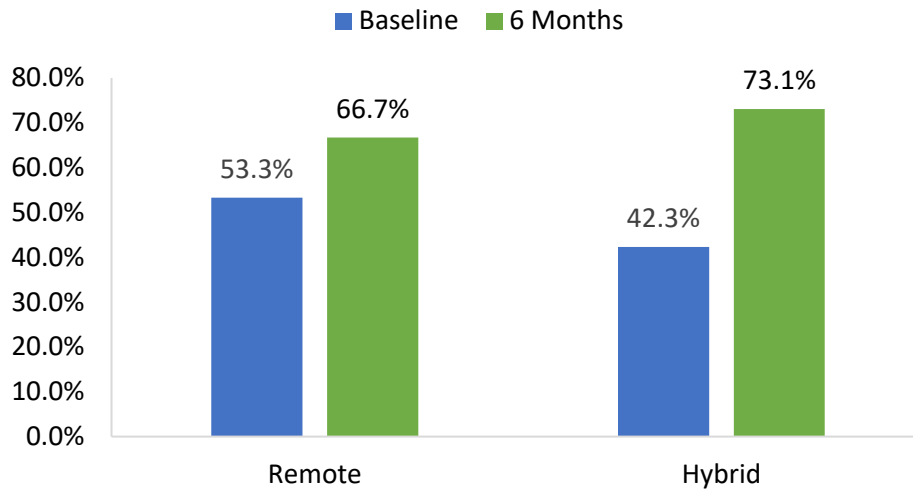
In both remote and hybrid matches, there was a statistically significant, positive shift in the distribution of responses concerning newcomers having someone to talk to about problems. For remote matches, the percentage increased from 46.7% at baseline to 80.0% at six months. In hybrid matches, it rose from 57.7% to 84.6%, indicating that more newcomers in both groups felt they had support to discuss their problems by the end of their matches (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Someone to Talk to About Problems They Are Facing: Baseline versus 6 Months



In terms of newcomers' perception that they have people who support them in their community, the results revealed a significant positive shift in the distribution of responses among newcomers in hybrid matches. The percentage of newcomers in hybrid matches feeling supported in their community rose from 42.3% at baseline to 73.1% at six months (see Figure 19). For remote matches, although the percentage of newcomers feeling supported increased from 53.3% to 66.7%, the overall shift in the distribution of responses did not reach statistical significance.

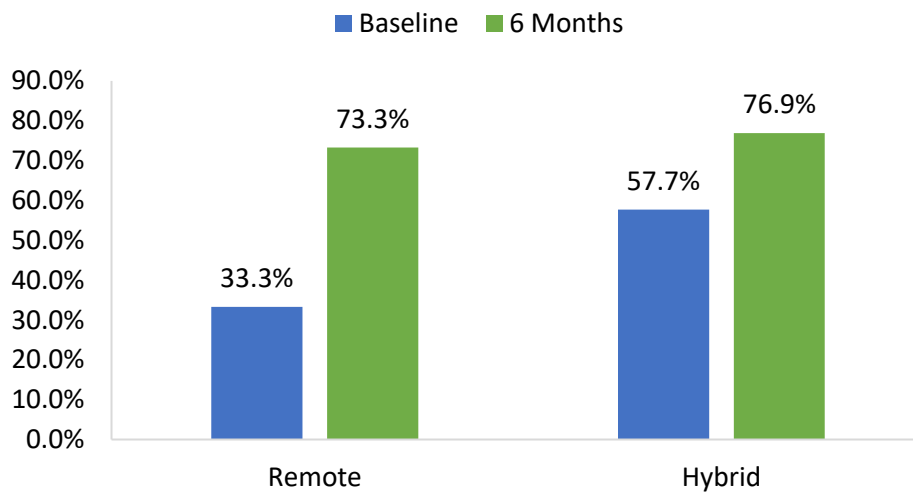
Figure 19. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have People who Support Them in Their Community: Baseline versus 6 Months



*Clients' Level of Understanding and Access to Available Services and Resources*

In remote matches, newcomers' access to services showed a statistically significant improvement. The percentage of newcomers who agreed or strongly agreed that they can access the services they need in Canada increased from 33.3% at baseline to 73.3% at six months (see Figure 20). Among newcomers in hybrid matches, 76.9% agreed or strongly agreed that they can access the services at six months, up from 57.7% at baseline. While this increase represents a positive trend, the shift in the overall response distribution among hybrid match clients did not reach statistical significance.

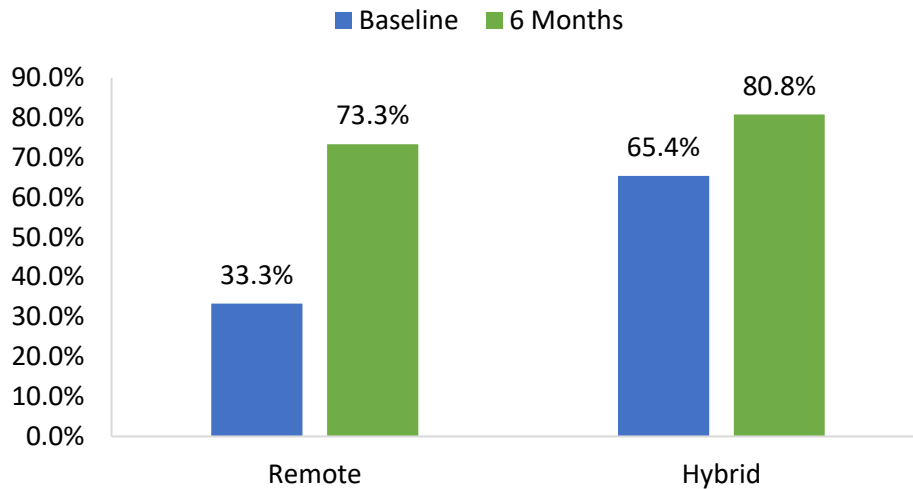
Figure 20. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They can Access the Services They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 6 Months



When asked about access to resources, the results revealed a similar pattern. For remote matches, there was a statistically significant shift in the distribution of responses, with the percentage of newcomers who

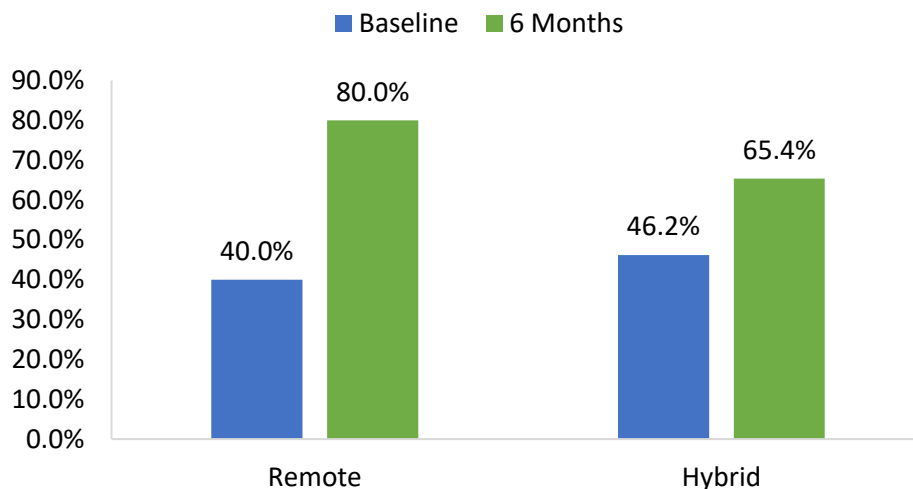
agreed or strongly agreed that they can access the resources they need in Canada rising from 33.3% at baseline to 73.3% at six months (see Figure 21). In hybrid matches, the increase from 65.4% to 80.8% represents a positive trend, though it did not reach statistical significance. However, it should be noted that clients in hybrid matches reported significantly better access to resources at baseline compared to clients in remote matches.

Figure 21. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Access the Resources They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 6 Months



In terms of newcomers' ability to access and understand information they need in Canada, the responses among newcomers in remote matches revealed a significant improvement. The percentage of those agreeing or strongly agreeing increased from 40.0% at baseline to 80.0% at six months (see Figure 22). For hybrid matches, while not statistically significant, the results revealed a positive trend with an increase from 46.2% to 65.4%.

Figure 22. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Access and Understand the Information They Need in Canada: Baseline versus 6 Months



*Percentage of Clients who Report that Their Settlement Needs Are Being Met*

At 6 months, when asked to identify the challenges they wanted to have help with since the beginning of the program, remote match clients selected 91 challenges (average 6.1/client), and hybrid match clients selected 119 challenges (average 4.6/client). The top two challenges identified by newcomers in both matches were practicing English or French (remote: 86.7%, hybrid: 88.5%), and finding employment (remote: 80.0%, hybrid: 65.4%, see Table 4). On third and fourth place were accessing government services (remote: 73.3%, hybrid: 42.3%) and pursuing education (remote: 60.0%, hybrid: 50.0%).

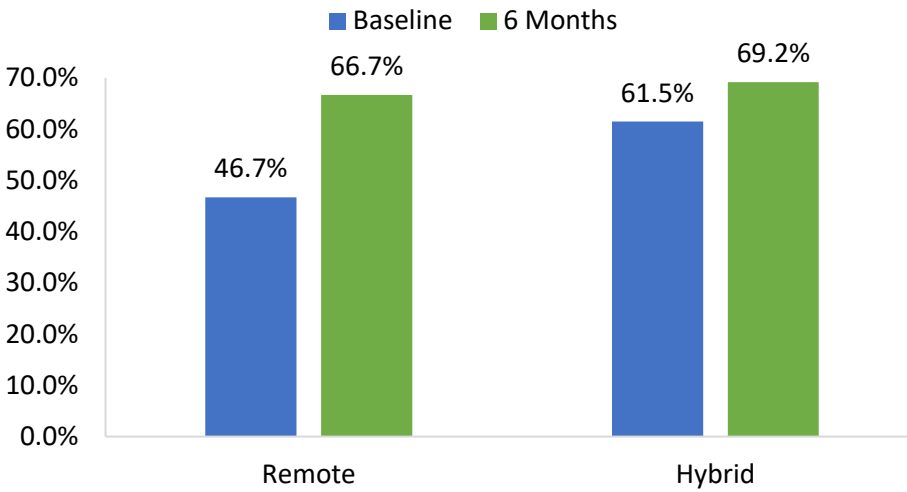
Table 4. Challenges for which Newcomers in Remote and Hybrid Matches Wanted Help with Since the Start of the Program (Assessed at 6 Months)

Challenge	Remote	Hybrid
Practicing English or French	86.7%	88.5%
Finding Employment	80.0%	65.4%
Accessing Government Services	73.3%	42.3%
Pursuing Education	60.0%	50.0%
Socializing/Friendship with Volunteers	53.3%	42.3%
Helping Children with Schoolwork/Extracurriculars	53.3%	42.3%
Expanding Social Network	53.3%	38.5%
Seeing Doctors/Navigating Healthcare System	46.7%	38.5%
Accessing Settlement Services	46.7%	19.2%
Using Public Transit / Getting Around	13.3%	7.7%
Learning about my Neighbourhood	6.7%	3.8%
Financial Literacy/Budgeting	6.7%	0.0%
Other:	26.7%	19.2%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing (3 remote clients, 3 hybrid clients)</li> <li>• Youth mentorship (2 hybrid clients)</li> <li>• Childcare support to attend ESL (1 remote client)</li> </ul>		

Newcomers in hybrid matches reported receiving more help from volunteers compared to newcomers in remote matches ( $M = 4.51$  vs.  $M = 2.73$ , on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = a great deal). However, the perception of challenges still being an issue was similar across match types (remote:  $M = 3.73$ , hybrid:  $M = 3.57$ , on the same scale), with newcomers perceiving the challenges neither overwhelmingly pervasive nor completely absent.

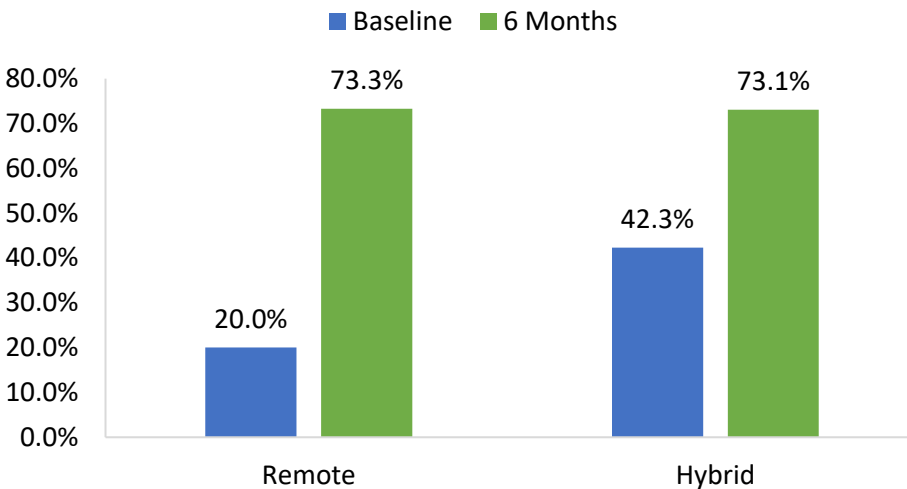
When asked to what extent their settlement needs were being met, 66.7% of newcomers in remote matches agreed or strongly agreed at 6 months (up from 46.7% at baseline) and 69.2% of newcomers in hybrid matches agreed or strongly agreed at 6 months (up from 61.5%, see Figure 23). While the results point in a positive direction, the shifts in the distribution of responses did not reach statistical significance.

Figure 23. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that Their Settlement Needs Are Being Met: Baseline versus 6 Months



However, when asked about their household’s progress toward their integration priorities, newcomers’ responses in both remote and hybrid matches revealed statistically significant improvements. For remote matches, the percentage of newcomers who agreed or strongly agreed that their household had made progress increased from 20.0% at baseline to 73.3% at six months (see Figure 24). Similarly, in hybrid matches, the percentage rose from 42.3% to 73.1%.

Figure 24. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that Their Household Has Made Progress Toward Their Integration Priorities: Baseline versus 6 Months

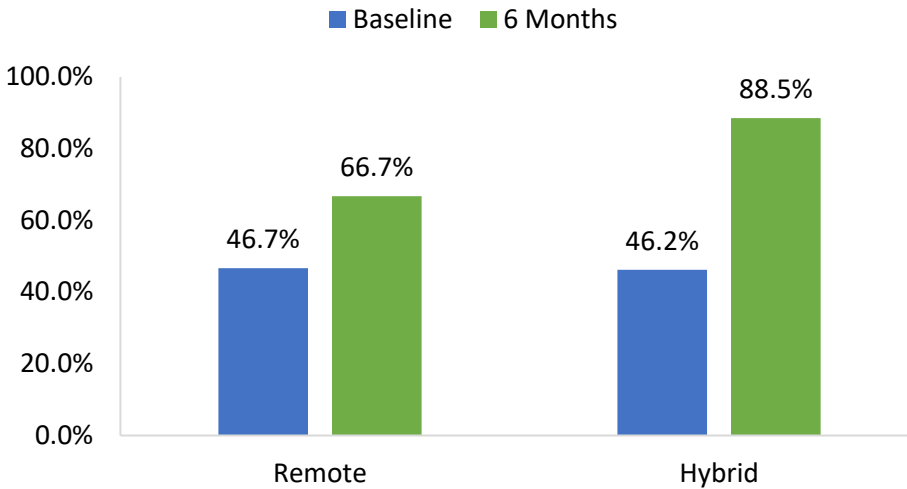


*Percentage of Clients who Report that They Can Make Informed Decisions about Their Life*

For hybrid matches, there was a statistically significant shift in the distribution of responses regarding newcomers' ability to make informed decisions about their life, with the percentage of those agreeing or strongly agreeing increasing from 46.2% at baseline to 88.5% at six months (see Figure 25). In remote

matches, the increase from 46.7% to 66.7% indicates a positive trend, but the shift in the overall response distribution did not reach statistical significance.

Figure 25. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Make Informed Decisions About Their Life: Baseline versus 6 Months



#### Intermediate Outcome 2: Clients are Connected to Communities and Institutions

The second intermediate of the project was that clients are connected to their communities and institutions in these communities. To assess this outcome, the evaluation focused on the following two indicators:

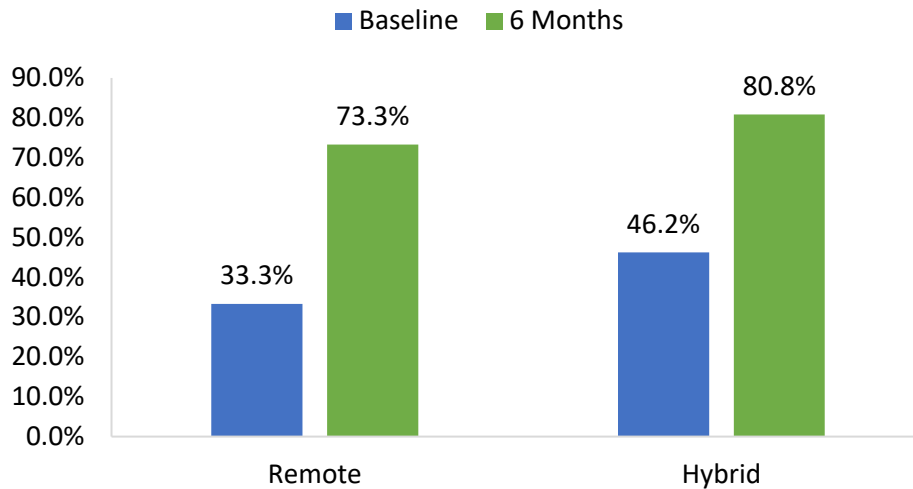
- Clients' level of attachment to their community
- Clients' participation and social integration in their community

#### *Clients' Level of Attachment to Their Community*

In both remote and hybrid matches, newcomers reported significant improvements in the connection to their communities. For remote matches, the percentage of newcomers who agreed or strongly agreed that they feel connected to their community rose from 33.3% at baseline to 73.3% at six months (see Figure 26). Similarly, in hybrid matches, the increase was from 46.2% to 80.8%.

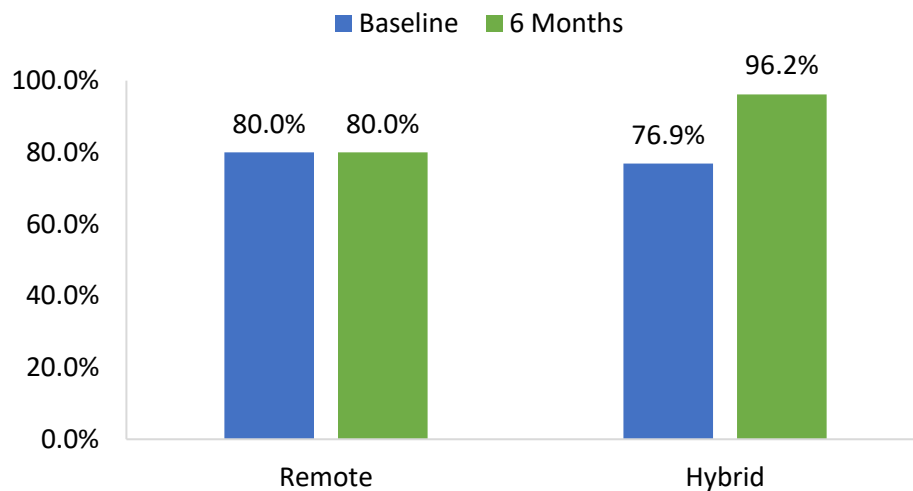


Figure 26. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Feel Connected to Their Community: Baseline versus 6 Months



In terms of newcomers’ feelings of welcome within their community, both remote and hybrid matches started with already quite high baseline levels of agreement. Specifically, remote matches maintained a stable percentage at 80.0% from baseline to six months, indicating no significant shift in the distribution of responses (see Figure 27). In hybrid matches, the percentage increased from 76.9% to 96.2%, reflecting a trend towards greater feelings of welcome.

Figure 27. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Feel Welcome in Their Community: Baseline versus 6 Months

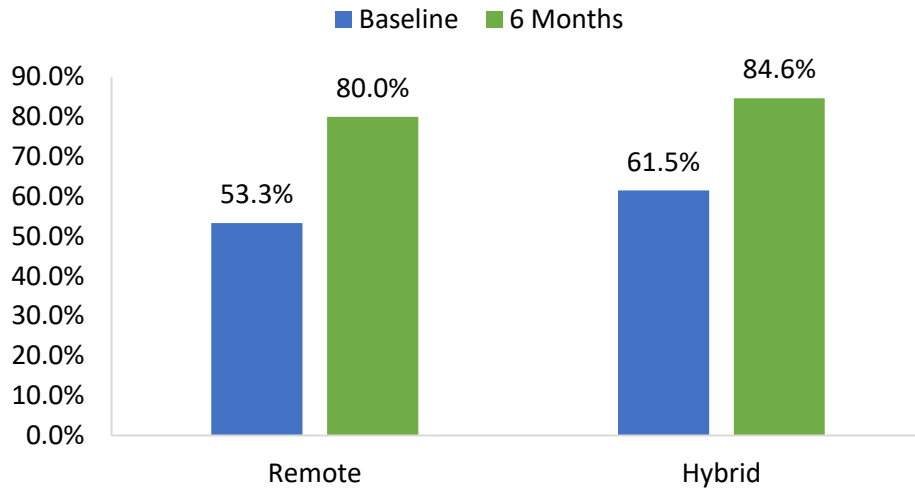


*Clients’ Participation and Social Integration in Their Community*

Newcomers' ability to participate in their communities showed increases from baseline to six months for both match types. In remote matches, the percentage of newcomers agreeing or strongly agreeing rose from 53.3% to 80.0%, and in hybrid matches, it increased from 61.5% to 84.6%. Despite these

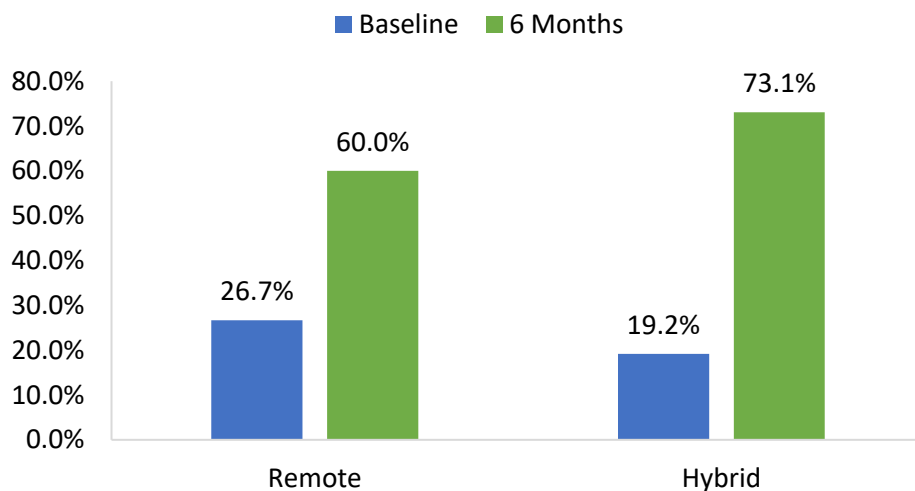
improvements, the shifts in the overall response distributions were not statistically significant for either match type (see Figure 28).

Figure 28. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Can Participate in Their Communities: Baseline versus 6 Months



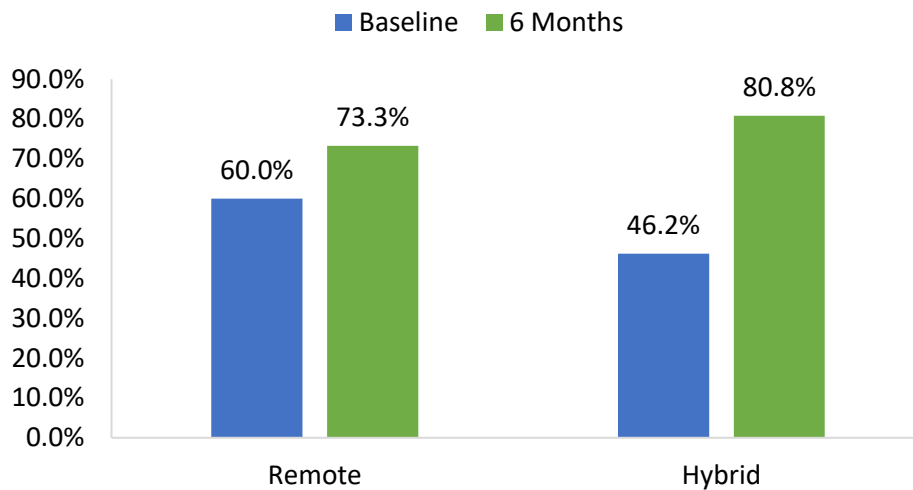
In terms of newcomers' feelings of social isolation, the results point towards significant improvements in both match types. Specifically, the percentage of newcomers in remote matches who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt socially isolated increased from 26.7% at baseline to 60.0% at six months (see Figure 29). In hybrid matches, the same percentage increased from 19.2% to 73.1%, revealing a clear reduction in feelings of social isolation.

Figure 29. Percentage of Newcomers who Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed that They Feel Socially Isolated: Baseline versus 6 Months



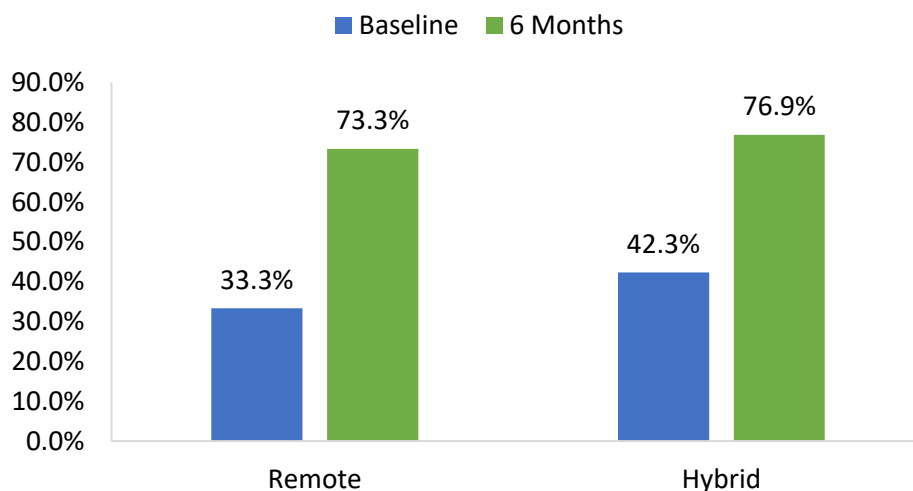
At 6 months, 73.3% of newcomers in remote matches (up from 60.0% at baseline) and 80.8% of newcomers in hybrid matches (up from 46.2% at baseline) agreed or strongly agreed that they have social connections in their community (see Figure 30). While the change in remote matches indicates a positive trend, it did not reach statistical significance, unlike the significant improvement in hybrid matches.

Figure 30. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Social Connections in Their Community: Baseline versus 6 Months



For both remote and hybrid matches, there was a statistically significant shift in the distribution of responses among newcomers regarding meeting people in their community with shared interests and social activities (see Figure 31). In remote matches, the percentage of newcomers who agreed or strongly agreed increased from 33.3% at baseline to 73.3% at six months. In hybrid matches, it rose from 42.3% to 76.9%.

Figure 31. Percentage of Newcomers who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Have Met People in Their Community who Share Their Interests and Enjoy the Same Social Activities as Them: Baseline versus 6 Months



### 3. Technology Used and Perceived Effectiveness and Efficiency of Remote and In-Person Interactions

#### 3.1. Survey Data at 3 Months

Data from the 3-month survey shows that the type of technology used in remote and hybrid matches did not significantly differ between match types. Messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp) were very popular, used by 79.3% of newcomers in remote matches and 78.1% of newcomers in hybrid matches, with effectiveness ratings of 69.6% and 84%, respectively (see Table 5). Phone calls were also frequently used, with 55.2% of newcomers in remote matches and 71.9% of newcomers in hybrid matches using them, both finding them effective at rates of 81.3% and 78.3%. Video calls showed a trend toward greater effectiveness in hybrid matches, used by 43.8% of newcomers and rated highly effective by 92.9%, compared to a 55.2% usage and 68.8% effectiveness in remote matches.

Text messages and other communication methods such as email and WhatsApp calls were less common. Text messages were used by 31% in remote matches and 15.6% in hybrid matches, with effectiveness ratings of 66.7% and 60%, respectively. Other technologies were the least used, with 13.8% in remote matches finding them 75% effective, while only 9.4% of newcomers in hybrid matches used them with a lower effectiveness rating of 33.3%.

Overall, the results at 3 months suggest that the types of technology used were similar across match types and rated overall as quite effective, particularly the video calls in hybrid matches.

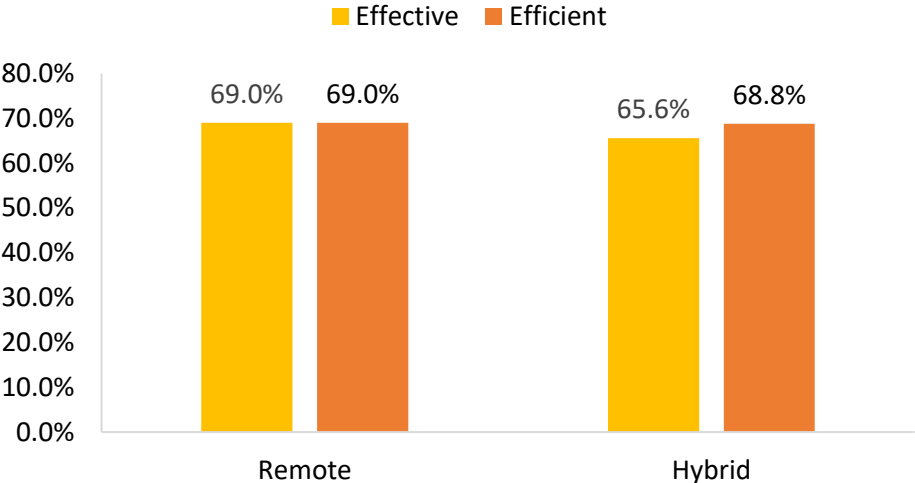
Table 5. Technology Used and Effectiveness at 3 Months

Technology Used	Remote Matches (n = 29)				Hybrid Matches (n = 32)			
	Used		Effective		Used		Effective	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Phone calls	16	55.2%	13	81.3%	23	71.9%	18	78.3%
Video calls (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom)	16	55.2%	11	68.8%	14	43.8%	13	92.9%
Messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp)	23	79.3%	16	69.6%	25	78.1%	21	84%
Text messages	9	31%	6	66.7%	5	15.6%	3	60.0%
Other	4	13.8%	3	75.0%	3	9.4%	1	33.3%
Other, please specify:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Email, social media</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• WhatsApp calls</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• WhatsApp Audio calls</li> </ul>			

*Note:* Effectiveness ratings were provided on a 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely scale. “% effective” refers to the percentage of newcomers in each match type who used a specific platform and rated it with a 5, 6 or 7.

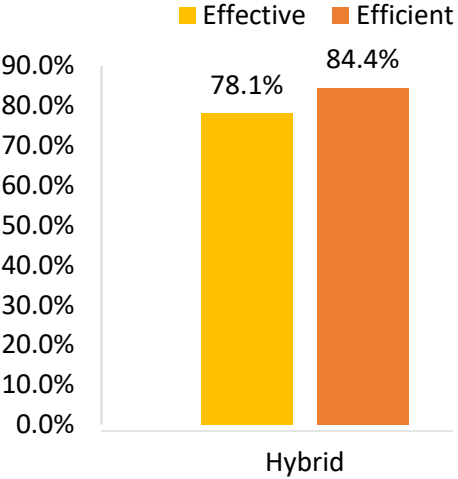
In addition, newcomers in both match types rated the effectiveness and efficiency of remote interactions for receiving social and integration support, providing their evaluations on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). Specifically, 69% of newcomers in remote matches and 65.6% in hybrid matches rated remote interactions as effective, marking a score of 5, 6, or 7 (see Figure 32). Additionally, newcomers in both match types similarly assessed the efficiency of using their time during remote interactions, with 69% of remote match newcomers and 68.8% of hybrid match newcomers giving high ratings.

Figure 32. Percentage of Newcomers who Reported that Remote Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Receiving Social and Integration Support at 3 Months



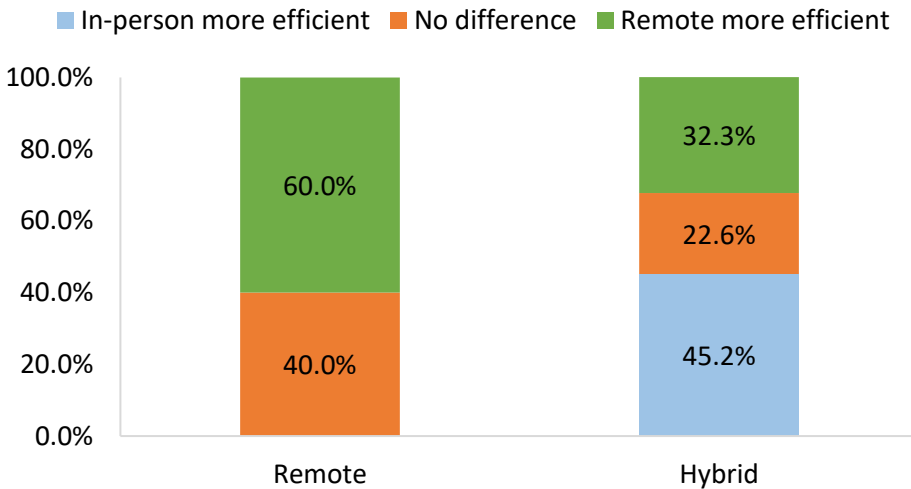
Furthermore, newcomers in hybrid matches also assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of in-person interactions, with 78.1% finding them effective and 84.4% finding them efficient (see Figure 33). These high scores reflect a positive perception of in-person meetings among newcomers in hybrid matches.

Figure 33. Percentage of Newcomers in Hybrid Matches who Reported that In-Person Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Receiving Social and Integration Support at 3 Months



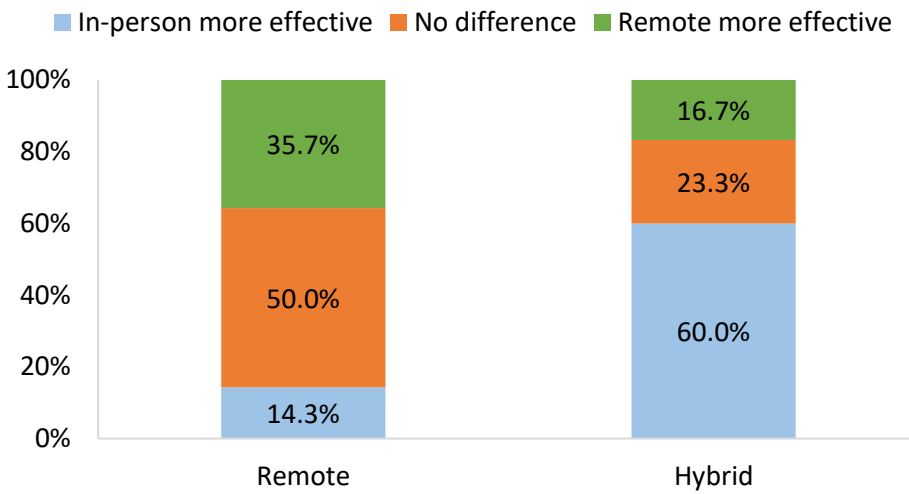
Finally, newcomers in both match types were also asked to directly compare remote and in-person interactions in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency. Among the 29 remote match newcomers, only 15 felt positioned to answer the efficiency comparison question. Of these, 60% (n = 9) viewed remote interactions as more efficient, while the remaining 40% (n = 6) perceived no difference (see Figure 34). In the hybrid matches, out of 31 respondents, 45.2% (n = 14) found in-person interactions more efficient, 32.3% (n = 10) favored remote interactions, and 22.6% (n = 7) saw no difference.

Figure 34. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Efficiency of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Newcomers in Each Match Type at 3 Months



For the effectiveness comparison, only 14 newcomers in remote matches responded: 35.7% (n = 5) believed remote interactions were more effective, 50.0% (n = 7) observed no difference, and 14.3% (n = 2) thought in-person interactions were more effective (see Figure 35). Among the hybrid match respondents, 30 answered the question, with 60.0% (n = 18) finding in-person interactions more effective, 23.3% (n = 7) seeing no difference, and 16.7% (n = 5) preferring remote interactions.

Figure 35. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Effectiveness of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Newcomers in Each Match Type at 3 Months



### 3.2. Survey Data at 6 Months

Six months into the program, newcomers were asked to provide the same information again about the technology used, its effectiveness, and the effectiveness and efficiency of remote and in-person interactions. The results showed that phone calls were significantly more favored in hybrid matches, used by 65.4% of newcomers with an effectiveness rating of 88.2%, in contrast to their 33.3% usage and 40% effectiveness in remote matches (see Table 6). Video calls were used by 53.3% of newcomers in remote matches with a 62.5% effectiveness rating, while in hybrid matches, half of the newcomers used them but reported a 100% effectiveness rate.

Messaging platforms remained the most frequently used technology across both match types, with 86.7% of remote and 96.2% of hybrid matches using them. However, effectiveness ratings differed with 30.8% in remote matches and 92% in hybrid matches rating them as effective. Text messages were used by 26.7% of newcomers in remote and 30.8% of those in hybrid matches, with effectiveness ratings of 50% and 62.5%, respectively. Less common technologies, such as email and WhatsApp voice calls, saw minimal use at 13.3% among newcomers in remote matches, with no effectiveness reported.

These results show that while the types of technology used were largely similar across match types – except for phone calls – the perceived effectiveness varied, with hybrid matches generally reporting higher effectiveness scores.

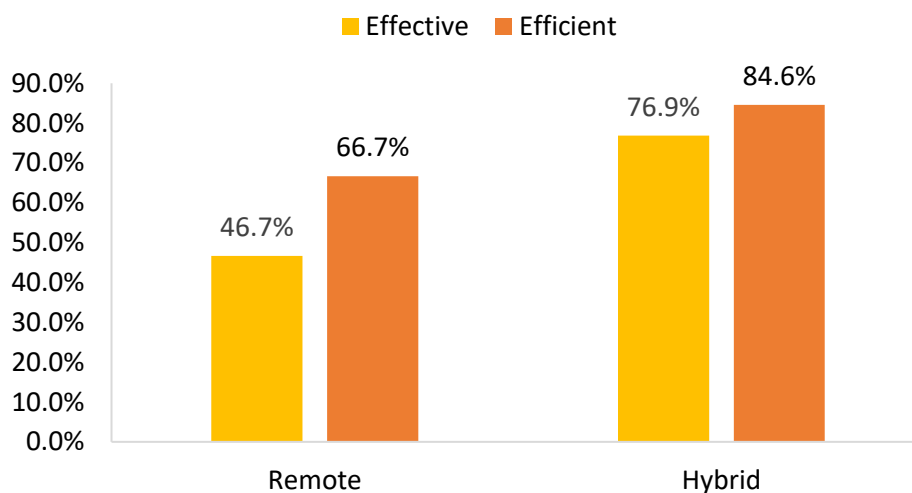
Table 6. Technology Used and Effectiveness at 6 Months

Technology Used	Remote Matches (n = 15)				Hybrid Matches (n = 26)			
	Used		Effective		Used		Effective	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Phone calls	5	33.3%	2	40.0%	17	65.4%	15	88.2%
Video calls (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom)	8	53.3%	5	62.5%	13	50.0%	13	100%
Messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp)	13	86.7%	4	30.8%	25	96.2%	23	92%
Text messages	4	26.7%	2	50.0%	8	30.8%	5	62.5%
Other	2	13.3%	0	0%	0	0%	N/A	N/A
Other, please specify:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email</li> <li>• WhatsApp voice call and voice message</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>			

Note: Effectiveness ratings were provided on a 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely scale. “% effective” refers to the percentage of newcomers in each match type who used a specific platform and rated it with a 5, 6 or 7.

The results for newcomers’ ratings of remote interactions overall showed the following results: 46.7% of newcomers in remote matches and a notably higher 76.9% in hybrid matches rated these interactions as highly effective, scoring them between 5 and 7 on the 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) scale (see Figure 36). Additionally, when evaluating the efficiency of using time during remote interactions, 66.7% of newcomers in remote matches and 84.6% of those in hybrid matches also provided high ratings, indicating a greater satisfaction with time management in hybrid settings.

Figure 36. Percentage of Newcomers who Reported that Remote Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Receiving Social and Integration Support at 6 Months

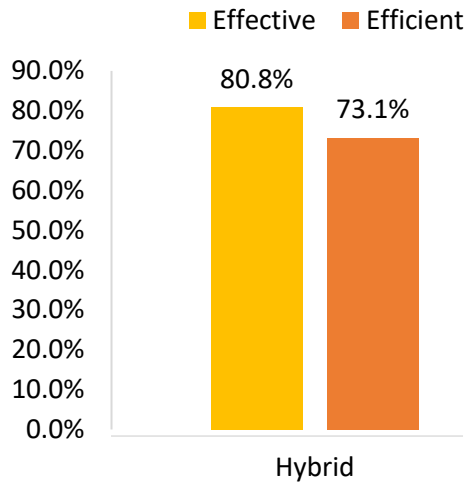


For in-person interactions, 80.8% of newcomers in hybrid matches found these meetings highly effective for receiving social and integration support (see Figure 37). The efficiency of time use during these in-



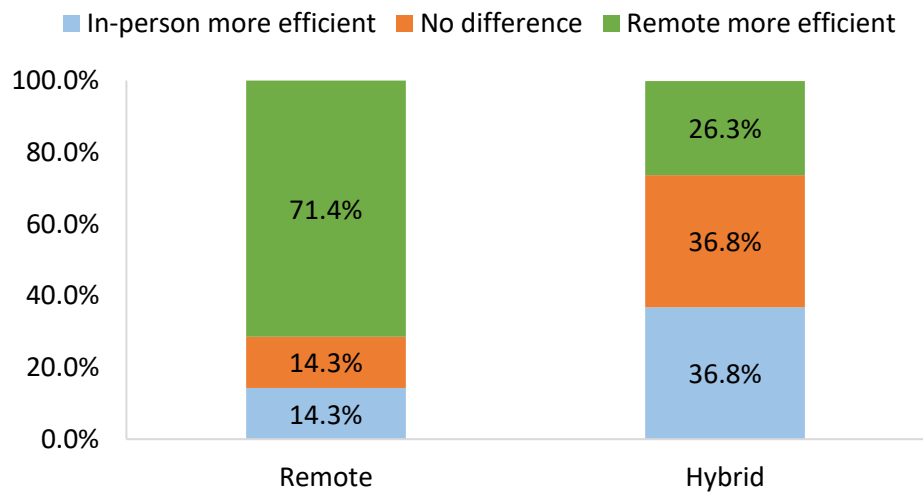
person interactions was also positively viewed, with 73.1% of newcomers in hybrid matches rating it as efficient.

Figure 37. Percentage of Newcomers in Hybrid Matches who Reported that In-Person Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Receiving Social and Integration Support at 6 Months



Finally, when asked to directly compare the efficiency of in-person and remote interactions, only 7 newcomers in remote matches responded, with 71.4% (n = 5) finding remote interactions more efficient, 14.3% (n = 1) observing no difference, and another 14.3% (n = 1) considering in-person interactions more efficient (see Figure 38). Among newcomers in hybrid matches, 19 responded: 26.3% (n = 5) found remote interactions more efficient, while 36.8% (n = 7) reported no difference, and an equal percentage (36.8%, n = 7) found in-person interactions to be more efficient.

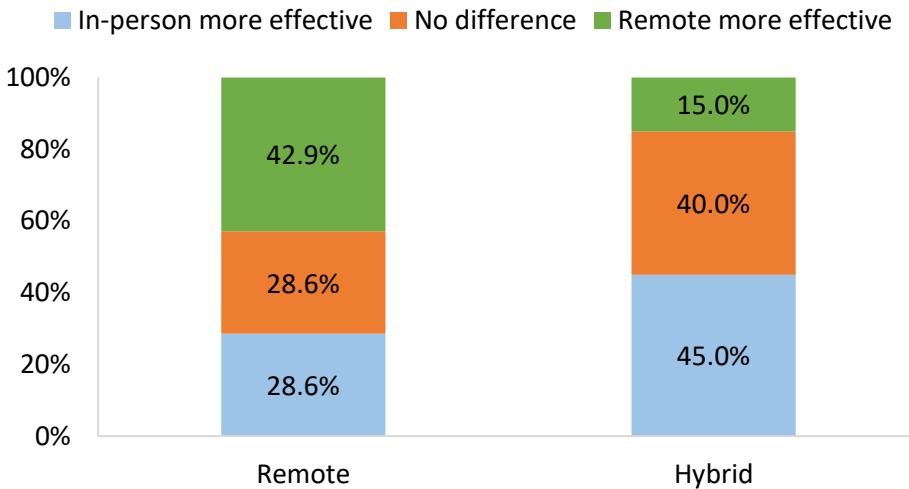
Figure 38. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Efficiency of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Newcomers in Each Match Type at 6 Months



When evaluating the effectiveness of these interactions, only 7 of the 15 newcomers in remote matches responded. 42.9% (n = 3) perceived remote interactions as more effective, 28.6% (n = 2) saw no difference,

and another 28.6% (n = 2) favored in-person interactions (see Figure 39). In hybrid matches, 20 of the 26 newcomers responded, with 15% (n = 3) stating that remote interactions were more effective, 40% (n = 8) seeing no difference, and 45% (n = 9) preferring in-person interactions as more effective.

Figure 39. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Effectiveness of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Newcomers in Each Match Type at 6 Months



#### 4. Internet Access and Confidence Using Technology

Internet access was already high at the beginning of the program, with nearly all newcomers reporting home Internet access. These high levels were maintained both at the middle of the match (3 months: 100% in remote, 96.9% in hybrid, compared to baseline: 100% in remote, 96.9% in hybrid) and at the end of the match (6 months: 100% in remote, 92.3% in hybrid, compared to baseline: 100% in remote, 100% in hybrid) for both match types.

Newcomers in both matches also generally reported that their Internet connection was consistent and reliable throughout the program (3 months: 89.7% in remote and 96.9% in hybrid, compared to baseline: 89.7% in remote and 90.6% in hybrid; 6 months: 93.3% in remote and 92.3% in hybrid, compared to baseline: 100% in remote and 96.2% in hybrid).

To access the Internet, nearly all newcomers reported using smartphones at all time points. Compared to the beginning of the program, the use of computers and tablets increased over time. In terms of computers, usage in remote matches increased from 37.9% at baseline to 72.4% at 3 months, and from 26.7% at baseline to 66.7% at 6 months. In hybrid matches, usage of computers increased from 50% at baseline to 65.6% at 3 months, but remained almost unchanged at 6 months (53.8% compared to 57.7% at baseline). In terms of tablets, usage in remote matches increased from 10.3% at baseline to 24.1% at 3 months, and from 6.7% at baseline to 20% at 6 months. In hybrid matches, usage of tablets remained almost unchanged from 9.4% at baseline to 12.5% at 3 months, but increased from 15.4% at baseline to 34.6% at 6 months. In addition, at 3 and 6 months, newcomers reported using more devices to access the Internet such as TVs. The frequency of technology use was consistently high across match types, with

newcomers using their devices at least once a week if not daily to communicate with friends (73.3% to 93.3%) and family (86.7% to 96.5%).

The use of public, free Internet increased from the beginning through the middle of the program (37.9% in remote matches and 50% in hybrid matches at 3 months, compared to 24.1% in remote matches and 9.4% in hybrid matches at baseline), and the end of the program (60% in remote matches and 34.6% in hybrid matches at 6 months, compared to 13.3% in remote matches and 3.8% in hybrid matches at baseline). More newcomers engaged in accessing the Internet at a broader range of public locations over time, including libraries, community centers, schools, immigrant-serving agencies, ethnocultural/religious organizations, restaurants/coffee shops, workplaces, friends' or relatives' homes, and other locations such as malls and superstores.

Overall, as the matches progressed from the start to the end of the program, newcomers not only maintained high levels of Internet access and reliability but also broadened their use of technology across more devices and public access points.

Newcomers were also asked to report how confident they felt using technology. They provided ratings on a scale of 1 = not at all confident to 5 = extremely confident. The results revealed no significant differences between match types. Newcomers reported high confidence levels in their ability to use technology, with certain activities rated particularly highly. The following are the average confidence ratings provided by newcomers across match types for specific activities<sup>4</sup>.

In terms of using instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, confidence levels started extremely high and, while there was a slight decrease, it largely remained very high across time, indicating stable confidence levels (baseline: M = 4.69 and 3 months: M = 4.30; baseline: M = 4.73 and 6 months: M = 4.42). Similarly, making video calls also began with very high confidence and did not change significantly over time (baseline: M = 4.56 and 3 months: M = 4.49; baseline: M = 4.62 and 6 months: M = 4.36). The same was the case for sending and receiving text messages, which showed very high initial confidence that remained stable across the program (baseline: M = 4.46 and 3 months: M = 4.20; baseline: M = 4.53 and 6 months: M = 4.27). The use of the Internet for looking up information also started high and maintained a relatively stable level throughout the program (baseline: M = 4.11 and 3 months: M = 3.90; baseline: M = 4.18 and 6 months: M = 4.07).

However, there were activities where confidence levels changed across time. The use of computers, tablets, or other communication devices initially showed very high confidence levels but saw a significant drop by the end of the program (baseline: M = 3.93 and 3 months: M = 3.44; baseline: M = 4.10 and 6 months: M = 3.83). Similarly, confidence in using social networking websites or apps started very high but dropped to moderate levels, although it slightly recovered towards the end of the program (baseline: M = 4.25 and 3 months: M = 3.67; baseline: M = 4.23 and 6 months: M = 3.77).

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<sup>4</sup> Of note, two separate baselines were computed: the baseline for those who provided ratings at 3 months, and the baseline for those who provided ratings at 6 months.

Finally, sending and receiving emails had the lowest ratings compared to the other activities, with ratings reflecting moderate to high confidence levels across time (baseline: M = 3.79 and 3 months: M = 3.54; baseline: M = 4.00 and 6 months: M = 3.95).

## 5. Satisfaction with the Program

At 3 months, 79.3% of newcomers in remote matches and 81.3% of newcomers in hybrid matches agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their experience participating in the Welcome Group Program. At 6 months, the satisfaction rate for newcomers in remote matches was 66.7% compared to 84.6% for those in hybrid matches. However, at both time points, the satisfaction rates did not differ significantly between the two match types.

## Newcomer Post-Match Interviews

A total of 11 qualitative interviews were conducted with randomly selected newcomers three months after the end of their matches. The goal of the interviews was to obtain further, in-depth information on the newcomers' experiences with the program and its impacts on their lives. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two researchers independently reviewed the transcripts and identified common themes. In this section, we describe these themes and provide sample quotes (edited for clarity).

### Expectations

Most newcomers were introduced to the Welcome Group Program through their caseworkers. Their expectations about the program varied, with some newcomers looking for specific support while others were uncertain of what to expect. For example, one newcomer expected help with practicing English:

*"My expectation is that they would just teach my parents English, but they did more than that."*

Another newcomer was hoping for support as she was facing a language barrier and had several doctor's appointments to attend:

*"At that time, we approached them because we needed some help because we had a language barrier and doctor's appointments."*

Yet another newcomer was apprehensive and unsure what to expect. Similarly, another newcomer had negative expectations due to past experiences but was then pleasantly surprised by the program:

*"I expected to be referred somewhere else because I previously had very bad experiences with such services. (...) However, they kept connected with me after the meeting. They helped me, encouraged me, and took initiatives through calls and messages and followed up on whether I was able to do what they asked me to do. This was surprising and I developed trust over them. This was an amazing experience."*

### Initial Meeting

Newcomers generally had positive initial meetings with the volunteers, describing them as welcoming and informative. For example, one newcomer described the meeting as follows:

*"The volunteers were very welcoming. They would listen and give us time and space to express our difficulties, challenges and whatever we have to say. They used all their effort to ask others about what we are telling them. Like, we would tell them our difficulties and they would gather information and come back with a solution. So they were very helpful."*

## Meeting Formats

The format of the meetings between newcomers and volunteers during their matches varied, depending on several factors, such as the nature of the help required, personal preferences, logistical considerations, and external circumstances such as COVID-19 restrictions.

In terms of the nature of the help required, specific challenges, such as help with paperwork, visa applications, going to doctor's appointments or socializing with children were better addressed through in-person meetings. For example, one newcomer was hesitant to send a picture of sensitive documents via email or WhatsApp and thus met with the volunteers in person. Another newcomer mentioned that while for herself remote interactions with the volunteers were sufficient, in-person interactions were better to support her children:

*"The in-person meetings were because of the assistance needed for my daughter or my son. If I needed anything during the week, the convenient method was just to pick up the phone and just give them a call. (...) They used to come and take my daughter out to a mall or a park or something like that just to socialize and get out of the house and change routes. For my son, one of the volunteers used to come every couple of weeks to take him out for a cup of coffee and just speak in English just to work on his language."*

Newcomers' preferences also played a role in the chosen meeting format. Some newcomers were open to either format, often going along with the meeting format suggested by the volunteers:

*"I don't have a preference. I just wanted my things to get done or I just needed help. So, I don't have a preference whether this is over the phone, virtual or in person."*

*"I didn't have a preference but mostly it was initiated by the volunteers so if they would like to meet in person, they would just recommend that or ask me if I'm free and if I had no problem I would meet in person and if they said okay, let's meet on Zoom I I'm also okay with that as well."*

Others showed a preference for in-person interactions, either due to inexperience using technology or due to the desire to build deeper connections.

*"My sister and my mom don't know how to speak English and don't know how to use Zoom."*

*"I prefer it [in-person meetings] because Zoom was not necessarily reliable. Sometimes it can cut off like you won't be able to hear the person properly. It's just nicer to be with the person, talk to them, have a cup of coffee etc. You can have a deeper and better face to face connection."*

Other newcomers preferred remote interactions due to their convenience. For example, one newcomer found remote interactions more convenient because she did not know how to find an address in Canada.

Several newcomers also preferred remote interactions as it helped them navigate logistical challenges and balance their work and family responsibilities.

*“I preferred virtual meetings because it was easier to connect virtually and I could even take the calls during my lunch break. It was also very difficult for me to travel and take non-paid days off. I would prefer not to lose pay so that's why I didn't prefer to meet in person. I also did not want to meet during the weekends because I didn't want the volunteers to use up their weekends to meet.”*

*“We didn't meet in person because we felt that there was no need for in person meeting. (...) I prefer remote interaction, because I think at first it saved time and that time saved gave us the opportunity to be able to conduct our other responsibilities in the family and our home.”*

*“I was also very busy because I'm also taking care of my child whenever I need to take them to school and pick them up so that that takes a lot of time. But also we used to make our calls in the evening, mostly around seven in the evening. So that was a time that I couldn't leave my house to meet people outside because that's late.”*

In addition, newcomers also mentioned that COVID-19 restrictions and concerns influenced their decision to meet remotely with the volunteers. One volunteer also described how they got used to meeting remotely and continued to do so, even after restrictions were lifted.

When newcomers were asked to directly compare in-person to remote interactions, several newcomers thought that in-person meetings were more effective but, at the same time, appreciated the efficiency of remote interactions, and that the choice of the meeting format would ultimately depend on a client's needs.

*“Overall, I think in person would be way more effective but if there is an availability issue or someone doesn't want to meet in person then I think remote is also good.”*

*“In my condition, it wasn't possible for me to travel with my job so virtual meetings were perfect for me. I wouldn't discourage in person meetings depending on people's requirements.”*

*“I think both are accurate, important and useful, but I think also meeting in person is more useful because people are different and some people need to know how to go and access the programs, and need someone to be there and show them how to do it in person. But because we know English, it wasn't very difficult for us to access the programs or wherever they send us. But meeting in person is useful because newcomers don't speak English or don't know how to navigate so they can be taken to a place and be shown how to take transportation, and do things they need to do.”*

## Meeting Frequency

The frequency of meetings between newcomers and volunteers varied widely, often depending on the unique needs and circumstances of the newcomers. However, at the beginning of the program, there seemed to be a higher intensity of meetings. As the program progressed, the meetings became less frequent or on an as-needed basis. The following quotes illustrate this:

*“The frequency of staying connected depended on my needs. It was almost 10 to 20 times a month in the beginning as there were a lot of challenges with child benefits and doctor’s appointments. Our meetings or connections slowly decreased as the challenges subsided and I was able to get child benefits and a family doctor.”*

*“Our communication became less frequent over time. (...) We were able to find the information on our own and we didn’t need to be in touch with them.”*

*“[We met] once a week at the beginning, and then it went to like three times each month.”*

Nevertheless, there were also cases where specific ongoing support was required and meetings remained consistently scheduled throughout the program. For example, one newcomer recalled:

*“I asked them for support and help with improving my English especially my conversational English. So we agreed to have weekly conversations about a topic or an issue that I wanted to talk about. So we’d practice my English during the weekly calls.”*

Once the program ended, several newcomers reported still being in contact with the volunteers. This was often for social reasons. The newcomers appreciated the sense of community and friendship that developed through their engagement with the volunteers. For example, one newcomer reported:

*“We mainly kept in contact after the program for social reasons or because we had a good relationship.”*

In a few cases, the volunteers still continued to provide occasional support, depending on the newcomers’ needs. For example, one newcomer reported developing a friendship with one of the volunteers who continued to provide specific support:

*“We reach out to each other through WhatsApp and arrange a meeting, like if we want to go out. We go out to cafes, the library. It’s more social than trying to get support. However, he [the volunteer] still does help me out with other things. Like he helps me find a job or stuff like that. But it’s more like a friendship.”*



## Challenges and Type of Support Received

In line with the results from the newcomer surveys, newcomers reported facing multiple challenges. Most newcomers reported experiencing a language barrier, which also caused problems accessing other services. For this reason, most newcomers needed help practicing English. Other challenges included finding employment, navigating healthcare and education systems, accessing government and settlement services, navigating public transport, expanding social networks, and housing assistance. The following quote is an example of a newcomer recalling the multiple challenges he faced:

*“There were a lot of challenges for me. The biggest challenge was finding a family doctor. The system in Canada is too different and it’s difficult to find one. The second one was to register my kids in school. The third one was how to get my driving license. The fourth one was how to apply for PR and everything.”*

The type of support provided by the volunteers varied from match to match, showing the volunteers’ ability to provide tailored support to the newcomers’ needs. The most common support provided was language practice, employment support and help navigating systems. Below are a few sample quotes:

*“The challenge was the language. I had joined school so it was much easier for me. If I’m practicing with them for an hour or up to three hours a week during our sessions...practicing a language with them helped me a lot. They helped me a lot when it comes to employment or finding work. They helped me with applying for a job, my resume and sometimes with the interviews as well.”*

*“One of the volunteers found a job at a restaurant for me. (...) They asked for my resume and I sent it to them. One of them drove me to the workplace and dropped my resume.”*

*“[The volunteer] helped me get my license like he would let me drive his car so that I can learn and he helped me go to the library and get a library card and he just helped me with my own area so that I know different places.”*

Several newcomers also mentioned how the volunteers helped them access different services and helped them fill out paperwork. For example, one newcomer recalled how the volunteers helped her submit an application to pursue education and register for the local foodbank. Another newcomer reported receiving help with a visa application for family members:

*“[The volunteer] helped us file a visa for my uncle and auntie who required the visa because we needed family help and assistance for our newborn baby. That was a big help for me, especially because I also developed postpartum depression.”*

Newcomers also appreciated the volunteers’ efforts to help them feel connected and integrated in the community. For example, one newcomer recalled how, besides the helpful language support she received, she appreciated how the volunteers helped her kids integrate into the community:

*“The best thing I have from the program would be the translation. It helped me a lot. Once I needed something, I just pick up the call and get it translated. The second thing is the connection that they had with my kids as they helped the transition for my kids to integrate in the community.”*

Finally, a common theme that emerged was the emotional support that the volunteers provided, as shown in the following quotes:

*“In fact, I would sometimes get extremely anxious at night, text them [the volunteers] at odd hours and feel guilty about it. However, they replied and if I said that I'm sorry for disturbing them at these hours they would often say that I don't need to apologize so they have always helped and they continue to help.”*

*“[The volunteers] were putting a lot of effort to make us feel warm. We were surrounded by people, always supported whenever we wanted to ask them for something. Sometimes they dedicated some sessions to practice English with our oldest daughter and son. They're always checking on the small kids and they provide the psychological and social support that we needed. They also provided the fun part of going out with us.”*

*“They lifted our spirit and they give us social support. We felt like we have family here each week as we went for a Zoom meeting for one and a half hours with four or five people talking to us about our life and what's going on in our life. We felt like we have a support system around us”.*

### Quality of Support Received

The majority of the newcomers were satisfied with the help they received, often indicating that it met many, if not all, of their expectations. For example, a newcomer mentioned:

*“At the beginning, if you want to measure it, I had like 20% (low) expectations from the volunteers. By the end of the group, this expectation reached 80% of what I was expecting. It was very good. I feel like I now know what to do and how to navigate my needs and challenges.”*

*“They were so responsive and that was over my expectation. In addition, they were extremely friendly. This is why I love the experience. I didn't expect the experience to be like that, but they were extremely friendly with me. And again, the timing and they provided me with more times than what was set in the schedule. So that was over my expectation.”*

At the same time, newcomers also mentioned that some of the challenges were still not resolved, despite the volunteers' efforts to help them. In most of these cases, the newcomers acknowledged the complexity of their challenges and that the volunteers' inability to help was influenced by factors beyond their

control. These challenges often related to the need for employment and affordable housing, as shown in the following quotes:

*“We didn't have enough progress in finding employment, I can partly understand why it didn't go or progress as, as we expected. Partly that could be because my English is still not at that advanced level. But also, I was busy taking other training programs.”*

*“The only challenge we might still have is employment because we are not employed yet. Though we are trying as we are submitting our resumes to different places.”*

*“I think we got most of our needs met from them. They tried to help us a lot and we appreciate it. The only major thing we were looking for was a subsidized house and they didn't help a lot with that. They asked many departments about it but they didn't have any way to help because everything goes through the department and other organizations have their own things to do. They told us to write a letter to the office for subsidized housing. We did and are still waiting for a response.”*

A couple of newcomers, expressed that some of their expectations were not met. One of these newcomers expected help finding a place to purchase used furniture and did not receive any help in that regard. Another newcomer thought that the help that the volunteers could provide was limited to language support and that they were not able to help her find a disability program for her son:

*“What I have received in that area is the best that the volunteers can do because the best they can do is provide me with translation. They don't have a background on these type of disability programs or how things are being handled with the government, so they were not able to help me in that area. (...) They provided me with links and websites etc. when I needed places or centers for my son to enroll or register in. However, they were not helpful at all so I didn't use any of these resources.”*

Finally, in some cases, newcomers also found alternative solutions to their challenges, either through their own research, friends or other organizations and no longer had to rely on the help of the volunteers.

### Impacts of the Program on Newcomers' Lives

The Welcome Group program had generally a positive effect on newcomers' abilities to navigate their new surroundings and access services and resources, engage with the community, and form new social connections. In particular, many newcomers reported enhanced confidence and independence:

*“The Together Project provided me with community resources and links. At the time, I used to think that I would get rejected wherever I go. The volunteers helped a lot with this (...) I started getting more hope. I'm now more confident in communicating my needs.”*

*“Whenever we were in doubt, they made us more confident that the way we were going is correct. It was very helpful for us. (...) Actually, before I depended a lot on them, but*

*nowadays I have become a little bit familiar with the rules and regulations here. So, I do research on my own. Most of the time I do research online.”*

*“In the past, I had a lot of negativity due to stress but I'm more positive and comfortable now. I'm able to search for things and find resources because I remember the instructions that the volunteers have given me.”*

*“They also helped me become more comfortable with using the Internet to find information and answer my questions by searching on Google.”*

Several newcomers also highlighted the role of the program in improving their English language proficiency, which in turn facilitated better social interactions. For example, newcomers mentioned the following:

*“For me improving my English was a very big issue. So, I had people that I could talk to and practice my English with which was a big help. And the fact that there are people who are available to support me that was heartwarming. (...) I think it has helped improve our social life compared to before the program because improving my English helped me improve my social life as well.”*

*“The program has a very positive impact on my life. My life is not the same compared to before the program. The positive impact includes being able to speak more English and to understand and socialize, in addition to getting a job, which was some of the challenges addressed by the program as well. So I had the chance to build a network, so I'm not alone anymore. (...) The program helped me know how to help myself, how to communicate and deliver a clear message to other people, how to socialize, being open to people, and not be alone.”*

The program also helped newcomers build social connections. While some reported developing relationships with volunteers, others reported making other connections through the program. A few sample quotes include:

*“What I loved the most was the spirit of helping that they [the volunteers] have. Also, they try to form friendships with the people they're helping. We were talking to the volunteers over the phone but they have a spirit that we already know each other like friends.”*

*“Because of them [the volunteers] we knew new people and then we got to also know the volunteers themselves too. Our social life is now better because of Together Project. (...) We [initially] didn't know a lot of families but we got 10 new connections through the Together Project.”*

*“I now have friends from school, work and acquaintances from our neighbors. And we just meet, go out and chill. This is how I'm not alone anymore. This program helped me*

*a lot but I cannot describe in words how the program helped me. It's just like feeling that I have like being comfortable... just to connect with people."*

Nevertheless, a couple of newcomers reported that their immediate social circles did not expand beyond the volunteer interactions, in part due to their own choice:

*"The program didn't help me much when it comes to socializing. I socialized with the volunteers in person but they didn't help me socialize with the community because I built my own community."*

*"[My social life] I think it's still the same. I don't have a lot of friends and social connections and I don't want any. I think friends don't stick around. (...) I had a bad experience with my friends."*

### Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations

Overall satisfaction with the program was generally high, with many expressing gratitude for the support received:

*"I think understanding or knowing that there are people who are willing to help you was the best thing about the program, because it gives me a feeling that there are people who will support me and I'm not isolated and alone. So, I think that was the best thing about the program. Also, it was good seeing an improvement in my English."*

*"I like many things about the program. I like their commitment and sincerity. I cannot describe the volunteers' support in words. They treated me as if I was their responsibility and felt our problems. They didn't let me feel conscious of where I'm from and my language. They understood my problems and encouraged me a lot."*

*"When you come from a different country to a new country, especially with a family that does not understand English, it feels like being blind and this program showed the way and helped me navigate the system. It also provided information I did not have."*

Most newcomers were satisfied with their experience and could not think of any way to improve the program. For example, one newcomer explained:

*"There's nothing for me to add about the program because I found it a very helpful program. Just being a part of the program, connected to people and not feeling lonely anymore is one of the best advantages of this program."*

Among the newcomers who offered suggestions for improvement, two newcomers raised issues directly related to their experiences. The newcomer who was hoping that the volunteers would find a specific program for her son with disabilities highlighted that volunteers should have more training and knowledge. The other newcomer appreciated being matched with a volunteer from the same country of

origin but emphasized that multiple languages were spoken in his country and wished that he had been matched with a volunteer who spoke the same language.

Finally, some newcomers highlighted the need for the program and wished they had known about it sooner. For example, they described their situations as follows:

*“I think based on my experience if the program or the match had started sooner or soon after my arrival, I would have more time to find my path and direction. For example, I could work during that time and I could prepare for the exam that I need to pass. However, when the program started, I had already missed around six months. And by the time I came to a conclusion about my future direction, almost one year had already passed while I had not made significant progress toward my career objectives. So, if it had started earlier, soon after my arrival, I would have had more time. I would have had more time to prepare and focus on my on my objectives.”*

*“When I first arrived, I felt very lonely and I didn't know what to do, how to help my children and how things will turn out. But having these programs helped me to overcome that feeling and it started smoothly and being able to gradually feel integrated and feel that we were making progress. So, the earlier the program starts I think it would be helpful. For example, soon after the newcomers' arrival.”*

## Volunteer Survey Data

### 1. Level of Preparedness and Expectations

In total, 28 volunteers completed the baseline survey. In the survey, volunteers were asked how their Welcome Group was formed, how prepared they felt and what their expectations were for the volunteer experience. About two-thirds of the volunteers (71.4%) were introduced and had their group formed by Together Project staff, while the rest (28.6%) approached Together Project as a group.

At the outset of their matches, 85.7% of volunteers reported understanding the challenges that refugee newcomers face after arriving in Canada (see Table 7). Additionally, 57.1% of volunteers had formed social connections with refugee newcomers and understood the process of refugee settlement and integration. However, only 39.3% of volunteers felt knowledgeable about different community and settlement services and agencies.

Table 7. Volunteers' Perceived Preparedness at Baseline

<b>At the outset of my current or upcoming match, I feel I ...<sup>1</sup></b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
understand the challenges that refugee newcomers face after they arrive in Canada.	24	85.7%
have formed social connections with refugee newcomers to Canada.	16	57.1%
understand the process of refugee settlement and integration.	16	57.1%
am knowledgeable about different community and settlement services and agencies.	11	39.3%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The percentages refer to those who selected 4 or 5.

In terms of volunteers' expectations, most volunteers (96.4%) hoped to help build more welcoming and integrated communities (see Table 8). Additionally, 85.7% expected to learn more about or participate in newcomer integration, and 82.1% aimed to meet and get to know refugee newcomers. Many volunteers (71.4%) wanted to learn about another culture, while 53.6% sought to meet and get to know other volunteers in their Welcome Group. Half of the volunteers (50.0%) wished to make new friends, and 28.6% looked to gain career experience. A small group of volunteers (7.1%) had other specific goals, such as helping people in need or sharing personal experiences as newcomers themselves to ease the transition for others.

Table 8. Frequency Table of Volunteers’ Expectations for their Volunteer Experience

<b>What do you hope you will get out of your volunteer experience with Together Project?</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Build more welcoming and integrated communities	27	96.4%
Learn more about and/or participate in newcomer integration	24	85.7%
Meet and get to know refugee newcomers	23	82.1%
Learn more about another culture	20	71.4%
Meet and get to know the other volunteers in my Welcome Group	15	53.6%
Make new friends	14	50.0%
Gain career experience	8	28.6%
Other, please specify:	2	7.1%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• help people in need</li> <li>• I am a new Canadian myself! I've been in Canada for 4 years, so one of my goal is transfer some of the experiences that I go to the new comers, so that they do not feel as lost and/or isolated as I did initially when I got here</li> </ul>		

## 2. Reasons for Chosen Match Type

At 6 months, 25 volunteers completed the end-of-match survey. One of the questions in the survey asked how they had been meeting with the newcomers. Following the same classification as with the newcomers’ responses, volunteers were either categorized as participating in a remote or hybrid match. Twelve volunteers participated in a remote match and 13 in a hybrid match<sup>5</sup>.

Volunteers in remote matches reported several reasons for preferring remote interactions. Many highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions as major reasons for choosing virtual meetings. Other common factors included scheduling conflicts and large geographic distances between themselves and the newcomers. Some volunteers also mentioned personal situations such as caregiving responsibilities or moving to another country as reasons for their remote participation. Additionally, a few volunteers indicated that minimal assistance was required from them, leading to only brief remote introductions.

Volunteers in hybrid matches chose their interaction methods based on convenience, necessity, and the specific needs of the clients. Despite at times meeting in person, remote interactions were often favored due to their convenience, allowing busy volunteers and newcomer families with time constraints and scheduling conflicts to connect easily. This format was particularly useful for volunteers who were students or had work commitments, making remote meetings a practical choice for addressing many of the family’s needs.

However, volunteers in hybrid matches also reported that some newcomer families lacked the necessary tools and technology skills to connect remotely, increasing the need for more in-person interactions. In-person meetings were also preferred for addressing challenges that required more personal engagement,

<sup>5</sup> Of the hybrid volunteers, 2 reported meeting ‘entirely, or almost entirely, in person’, 2 ‘mostly in person, some remotely’, 2 ‘equally in person and remotely’ and 7 ‘mostly remotely, some in person’.



such as English practice sessions, guiding families to appointments, or assisting with paperwork. Volunteers in hybrid matches felt that in-person meetings were not only more personal but also more effective for certain activities. Whenever direct family involvement was necessary, such as calling government services, in-person meetings were arranged. Overall, among hybrid volunteers, the chosen meeting format was described as convenient for everyone involved, strategically balancing the ease of virtual communication with the benefits of personal interaction when required.

Volunteers were also asked if their meeting format had changed over the course of their matches. Among remote match volunteers, 83.3% (n = 10) said no, 8.3% (n = 1) said yes, and 8.3% (n = 1) did not answer. The volunteer who said that their match had changed mentioned that compared to earlier in the match, later in the match they met more in person. This was because the family became more comfortable with the volunteers.

Among volunteers in a hybrid match, 69.2% (n = 9) said that their meeting format had not changed. The remaining 30.8% (n = 4) said it had changed as follows: Two said that compared to earlier in the match, later they met more in person. This was due to the specific challenges the families were facing. Another volunteer said that compared to earlier in the match, later they met more remotely and this was because the family had become more engaged in society and learned how to use social media, and another volunteer said that over time the meeting frequency had lessened.

### 3. Outcomes

The end-of-match survey also assessed several outcomes for the volunteers, including the knowledge gained by volunteers, their perceived impact on communities and newcomers' lives, and the extent of social connections formed.

#### Knowledge Gained

After their match, 83.3% of the volunteers in remote matches and 84.6% of those in hybrid matches reported a better understanding of the challenges refugee newcomers face after they arrive in Canada (see Table 9). Additionally, 50.0% of remote volunteers and 69.2% of hybrid volunteers felt they had a better understanding of the process of refugee settlement and integration. In terms of knowledge about community and settlement services, 66.7% of remote volunteers and 84.6% of hybrid volunteers felt more informed. Regarding their cultural learning experiences, 66.7% of remote volunteers and 69.2% of hybrid volunteers believed they had learned more about another culture. Similarly, 66.7% of remote volunteers and 84.6% of hybrid volunteers felt they had learned more about newcomer integration. These findings indicate that volunteers in both match types experienced a substantial growth in understanding the challenges of newcomers. Volunteers also improved their knowledge of newcomer integration, particularly among those in hybrid matches.

Table 9. Knowledge Gained by Volunteers

	Remote	Hybrid
<b>Compared to before my match, after my match I feel I ...<sup>1</sup></b>		
have a better understanding of the challenges that refugee newcomers face after they arrive in Canada.	83.3%	84.6%
better understand the process of refugee settlement and integration.	50.0%	69.2%
am more knowledgeable about different community and settlement services and agencies.	66.7%	84.6%
<b>How much do you feel you got each of the following from your volunteer experience with Together Project?<sup>2</sup></b>		
I learned more about another culture.	66.7%	69.2%
I learned more about newcomer integration.	66.7%	84.6%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The percentages refer to those who selected 4 or 5. <sup>2</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely. The percentages refer to those who selected 5 - 7.

#### Perceived Impact on Communities and Newcomers' Lives

At 6 months, 50.0% of remote volunteers and 84.6% of hybrid volunteers felt they had made a difference in a newcomer's transition to life in Canada (see Table 10). When asked about their contributions, only 25.0% of remote volunteers felt they had helped build a more welcoming and integrated community, compared to 76.9% of hybrid volunteers. Additionally, 66.7% of remote volunteers and 76.9% of hybrid volunteers felt they had participated in newcomer integration. Regarding their personal goals, 33.3% of remote volunteers and 69.2% of hybrid volunteers felt they were able to achieve what they had hoped for in terms of helping refugee newcomers. These results suggest that volunteers in hybrid matches generally perceived a more significant impact on their communities and the lives of newcomers than those in remote matches.

Table 10. Volunteers' Perceived Impact on Communities and Newcomers' Lives

	Remote	Hybrid
<b>Compared to before my match, after my match I feel I ...<sup>1</sup></b>		
made a difference in a newcomer's transition to live in Canada.	50.0%	84.6%
<b>How much do you feel you got each of the following from your volunteer experience with Together Project?<sup>2</sup></b>		
I helped to build a more welcoming and integrated community.	25.0%	76.9%
I participated in newcomer integration.	66.7%	76.9%
<b>How much do you feel you were able to achieve what you had hoped to achieve for refugee newcomers?<sup>2</sup></b>	33.3%	69.2%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The percentages refer to those who selected 4 or 5. <sup>2</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely. The percentages refer to those who selected 5 - 7.

## Social Connections

In terms of social connections with refugees, 41.7% of remote volunteers and 84.6% of hybrid volunteers reported forming new social connections (see Table 11). Similarly, 58.3% of remote volunteers and 100.0% of hybrid volunteers reported having met refugee newcomers. Additionally, 25.0% of remote volunteers and 92.3% of hybrid volunteers reported forming friendships with refugee newcomers. Regarding social connections with other volunteers, half of the remote volunteers said they had met other volunteers in their Welcome Group and got to know them better, compared to 76.9% of hybrid volunteers who reported similar experiences. Furthermore, 50.0% of remote volunteers and 61.5% of hybrid volunteers reported forming friendships with other volunteers in their Welcome Group. These findings suggest that hybrid volunteers generally felt they established more social connections with refugee newcomers and other volunteers compared to those in remote matches.

Table 11. Social Connections formed with Refugee Newcomers and Other Volunteers

	Remote	Hybrid
<b>Compared to before my match, after my match I feel I ...<sup>1</sup></b>		
I formed new social connections with refugee newcomers to Canada.	41.7%	84.6%
<b>How much do you feel you got each of the following from your volunteer experience with Together Project?<sup>2</sup></b>		
I met refugee newcomers.	58.3%	100.0%
I formed friendships with refugee newcomers.	25.0%	92.3%
I met other volunteers in my Welcome Group.	50.0%	76.9%
I got to know other volunteers in my Welcome Group.	50.0%	76.9%
I formed friendships with other volunteers in my Welcome Group.	50.0%	61.5%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The percentages refer to those who selected 4 or 5. <sup>2</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely. The percentages refer to those who selected 5 - 7.

## 4. Technology Used and Perceived Effectiveness and Efficiency of Remote and In-Person Interactions

Volunteers were asked to indicate the specific technology platforms they used for the remote interactions with the newcomers. Video calls (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Zoom) were the most popular technology, with 75.0% of remote volunteers and 76.9% of hybrid volunteers using them (see Table 12). However, only 44.4% of remote volunteers found video calls effective, compared to 80.0% of hybrid volunteers. Messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp) were also widely used, with 66.7% of remote volunteers and 69.2% of hybrid volunteers using them. Among these users, 75.0% of remote and 66.7% of hybrid volunteers rated messaging platforms as effective. Phone calls were less commonly used, with 41.7% of remote and 46.2% of hybrid volunteers relying on them. In terms of effectiveness, 60.0% of remote and 50.0% of hybrid volunteers found phone calls helpful. Text messages were the least used, with only 8.3% of remote and 38.5% of hybrid volunteers using them. While all remote volunteers who used text messages rated them as effective, only 20.0% of hybrid volunteers found text messages helpful. These findings indicate

that video calls and messaging platforms were the most commonly used and generally considered effective technologies for connecting with newcomers.

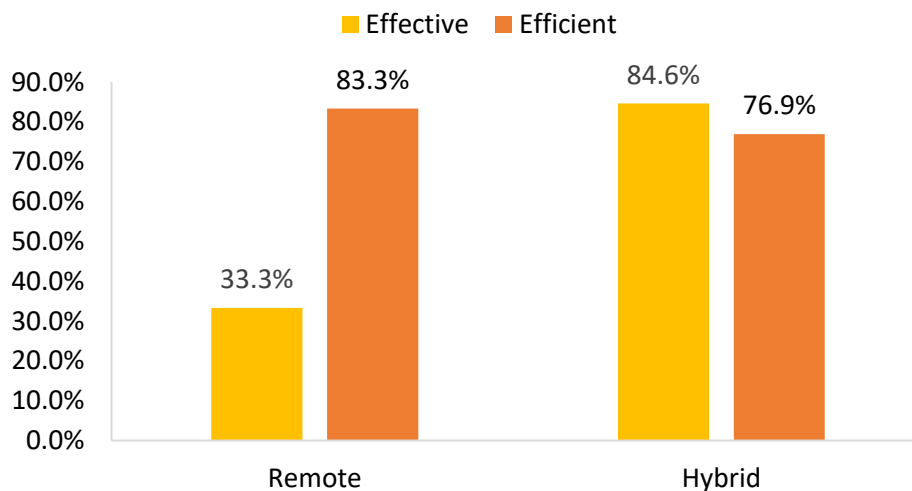
Table 12. Technology Used and Effectiveness at 6 Months

Technology Used	Remote Matches (n = 12)				Hybrid Matches (n = 13)			
	Used		Effective		Used		Effective	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Phone calls	5	41.7%	3	60.0%	6	46.2%	3	50.0%
Video calls (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom)	9	75.0%	4	44.4%	10	76.9%	8	80.0%
Messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp)	8	66.7%	6	75%	9	69.2%	6	66.7%
Text messages	1	8.3%	1	100%	5	38.5%	1	20%
Other	0	0%	N/A	N/A	0	0%	N/A	N/A

Note: Effectiveness ratings were provided on a 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely scale. “% effective” refers to the percentage of newcomers in each match type who used a specific platform and rated it with a 5, 6 or 7.

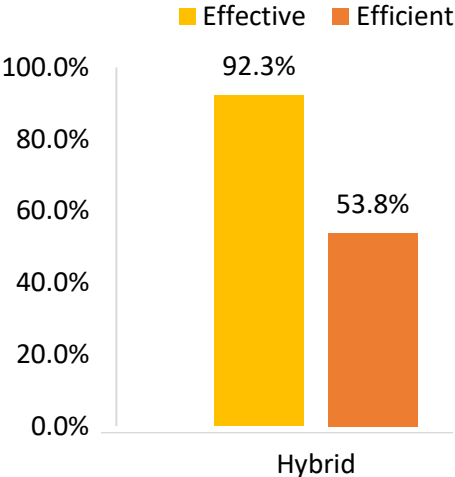
Volunteers were also asked to indicate how effective and efficient remote interactions were overall to provide social and integration support to newcomers. Among volunteers in remote matches, only 33.3% considered remote interactions effective for providing social and integration support, compared to 84.6% of those in hybrid matches (see Figure 40). In terms of efficiency, 83.3% of volunteers in remote matches found remote interactions efficient, while 76.9% of hybrid volunteers reported the same. These results suggest that hybrid match volunteers perceived remote interactions to be both more effective and similarly efficient compared to remote match volunteers.

Figure 40. Percentage of Volunteers who Reported that Remote Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Providing Social and Integration Support at 6 Months



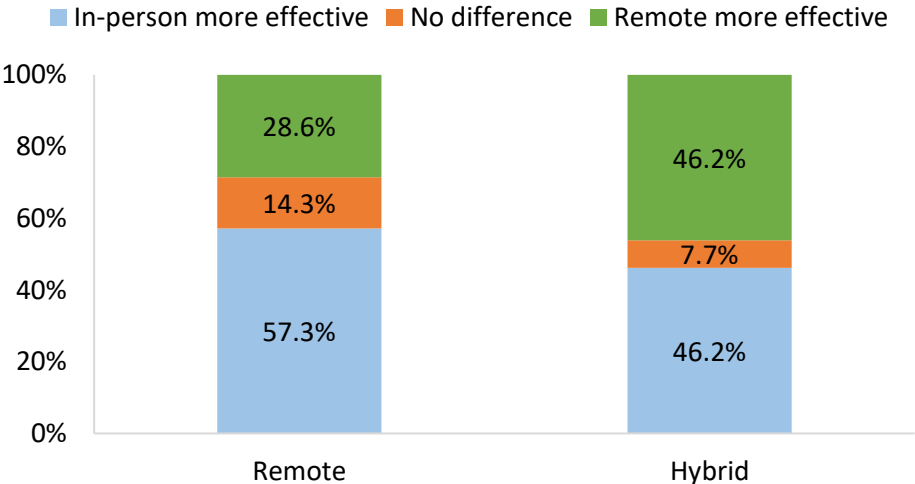
Volunteers in hybrid matches also rated the effectiveness and efficiency of in-person interactions for providing social and integration support to newcomers. Almost all volunteers (92.3%) found them effective, while about half of them (53.8%) considered them efficient (see Figure 41).

Figure 41. Percentage of Volunteers in Hybrid Matches who Reported that In-Person Interactions Were Effective and Efficient for Providing Social and Integration Support at 6 Months



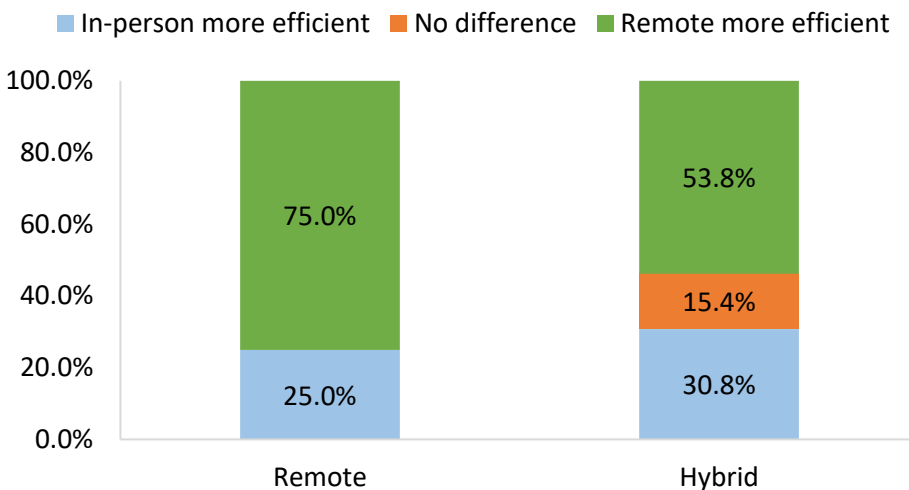
Finally, newcomers were also asked to directly compare the effectiveness and efficiency of in-person versus remote interactions. In terms of effectiveness, only 7 out of the 12 volunteers in a remote match answered. Of those 7 respondents, 28.6% (n = 2) indicated that remote interactions are more effective, while 57.1% (n = 4) believed in-person interactions are more effective (see Figure 42). One person (14.3%) saw no difference between the two. In hybrid matches, responses of the 13 volunteers were evenly split: 46.2% (n = 6) said that remote interactions are more effective, and 46.2% (n = 6) stated that in-person interactions are more effective. One volunteer (7.7%) believed there is no difference between the two.

Figure 42. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Effectiveness of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Volunteers in Each Match Type at 6 Months



In terms of efficiency, only 8 of the 12 volunteers in a remote match provided a response. Of those, 75% (n = 6) believed that remote interactions are more efficient, while 25% (n = 2) felt that in-person interactions are more efficient (see Figure 43). In hybrid matches, 53.8% (n = 7) found remote interactions more efficient, 30.8% (n = 4) considered in-person interactions more efficient, and 15.4% (n = 2) saw no difference between the two.

Figure 43. Direct Comparison of the Perceived Efficiency of In-Person and Remote Interactions among Volunteers in Each Match Type at 6 Months



## 5. Satisfaction with the Volunteer Experience

Volunteers rated the onboarding, training, and support provided by Together Project on various dimensions (see Table 13). In terms of the onboarding and training sessions, 91.7% of remote volunteers and 61.5% of hybrid volunteers found the sessions useful, while the same percentage of remote volunteers (91.7%) and 53.8% of hybrid volunteers considered the sessions thorough.

In terms of staff support and guidance during the matches, 58.3% of remote volunteers and 61.5% of hybrid volunteers believed the support was useful. An equal proportion of remote (58.3%) and hybrid volunteers (61.5%) felt that the guidance was thorough, and 66.7% of remote volunteers and 61.5% of hybrid volunteers found the support to be timely.

Overall, 66.7% of remote volunteers and 53.8% of hybrid volunteers were satisfied with the level of support and guidance provided by Together Project staff during their matches. These results indicate that remote volunteers generally rated the onboarding and training sessions higher, while perceptions of staff support during matches were consistent across both match types.

Table 13. Volunteers’ Perception of the Onboarding, Training and Support Provided by Together Project

	Remote	Hybrid
<b>How would you rate the onboarding and training session on the following dimensions?<sup>1</sup></b>		
Useful	91.7%	61.5%
Thorough	91.7%	53.8%
<b>How would you rate the level of support and guidance that you received from Together Project staff during your match?<sup>1</sup></b>		
Useful	58.3%	61.5%
Thorough	58.3%	61.5%
Timely	66.7%	61.5%
<b>Overall, how satisfied are you with the level of support and guidance that you received from Together Project staff during your match?<sup>1</sup></b>	66.7%	53.8%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely. The percentages refer to those who selected 5 - 7.

Volunteers were also asked to share their overall perceptions of their experiences with the Welcome Group Program (see Table 14). In terms of gaining career experience, 33.3% of remote volunteers and 61.5% of hybrid volunteers felt that they had benefited. When asked how much they felt able to achieve their personal goals through the volunteering experience, 41.7% of remote volunteers and 69.2% of hybrid volunteers indicated that they were successful.

In terms of their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience, half of the volunteers in a remote match were satisfied (50.0%), while the majority of volunteers in a hybrid match were satisfied (92.3%). When asked what would have improved their satisfaction, remote volunteers provided various suggestions. One volunteer felt that working with a different match could have made the experience more fulfilling, particularly if the initial match had been less complex or more manageable, allowing the volunteer to feel more equipped to help. Others suggested that more in-person sessions, better communication and support from Together Project staff, and increased encouragement from Together Project staff to families to accept assistance would have improved their ability to help. Similarly, some volunteers believed that greater engagement from the families would have helped volunteers be more supportive. Finally, a few volunteers also noted organizational and scheduling issues among the group of volunteers, as well as personal responsibilities that limited their ability to help. Hybrid match volunteers also offered a few suggestions for how their satisfaction could have been improved further. This included better onboarding, more interaction with and acts of appreciation by Together Project staff, and more connections and meet-ups with other volunteer groups to share experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their assigned families. One volunteer also wished for another match where they could have been more helpful.

Overall, these results reveal clear differences in career experience, personal achievement and satisfaction between the two match types, with hybrid match volunteers reporting higher levels in all three areas. Nevertheless, most volunteers in both match types reported that they would recommend the volunteer experience to a friend or colleague (91.7% of remote volunteers and 84.6% of hybrid volunteers).

Table 14. Volunteers' Overall Perception of their Volunteer Experience

	Remote	Hybrid
I gained career experience. <sup>1</sup>	33.3%	61.5%
How much do you feel you were able to achieve what you had hoped to achieve for yourself? <sup>1</sup>	41.7%	69.2%
Overall, how satisfied are you with your volunteer experience? <sup>1</sup>	50.0%	92.3%
I would recommend this volunteer experience to a friend or colleague. <sup>2</sup>	91.7%	84.6%

Note: <sup>1</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely. The percentages refer to those who selected 5 - 7. <sup>2</sup> Answers were provided on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The percentages refer to those who selected 4 or 5.

Finally, volunteers were also asked if anything had surprised them about their volunteer experience. Volunteers in remote matches reported a variety of unexpected challenges. For example, two volunteers noted organizational issues, describing the program as somewhat unstructured and less supportive than expected, which left them to navigate their roles without much guidance. Another volunteer noted the language barrier and lack of available interpretation as a challenge to effectively support the newcomer family. Another volunteer was surprised to discover that the match with the family only occurred after the family had been in Canada for a year. Personal circumstances also impacted volunteers' experiences; one mentioned the difficulty of continuing their volunteer work after the other volunteers had left the group, and another expressed regret that they could not contribute more after a personal family illness. Two volunteers also described a mismatch between what was expected and what could realistically be provided. In particular, one volunteer was surprised that the family did not require much help, and the other volunteer found that the family had higher expectations than they could meet. On a more positive note, one volunteer was surprised to learn more about the different background of the family, and another volunteer was surprised to have connected with the family very quickly.

Hybrid volunteers also shared a variety of surprises from their experiences. A new Canadian volunteer was struck by the large differences between their own immigration journey and that of the family they helped. Another volunteer highlighted the significant barriers newcomers face and the complexity of the integration process. There were also concerns about a lack of respect for timelines, which differed from the corporate environment, and the continuous learning required in their role. Specific issues were also raised, such as one volunteer feeling underappreciated by the staff despite their dedication, and another noting a gap between newcomers' expectations and what the program could deliver. Additionally, a volunteer observed that while the newcomer family appreciated the connections made, they were not very interested in receiving help. On a positive note, one volunteer valued the strong camaraderie and support within the volunteer group, while another praised the dedication and hard work of the other volunteers.



## Settlement Staff Interviews

A total of eight settlement staff participated in the interviews. They represented the three partner organizations: COSTI Immigrant Services, Catholic Centre for Immigrants, and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society. All of them were in direct contact with refugee families participating in the Welcome Group Program. Their experience working with refugees ranged from 2 to 16 years. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed independently by two researchers to identify key themes. These themes, along with sample quotes (edited for clarity), are described below.

### Role and Benefits of Volunteers

All interviewed settlement staff recognized the important role volunteers play in the integration of newcomers. Volunteers offer informal, friend-like interactions that differ from the formal relationships maintained by caseworkers, easing newcomers into their new environment. This dynamic helps newcomers feel supported, often leading to increased comfort and openness among newcomers to express themselves and their needs. For example, three settlement staff mentioned:

*"Sometimes the clients come here with no friends, no one. Of course, they have a caseworker like me, but the relation between the client and me is formal. There are also boundaries between us but when they meet with volunteers it's kind of like friends, informal."*

*"Sometimes the family they feel more comfortable with the volunteers. So, they will open up to the volunteers more."*

*"The volunteers can reach the clients, [they] are closer in the sense that they're seeing them in more relaxing environments or more often in person."*

Similarly, another settlement staff appreciated that the Welcome Group Program provides a structured way to help clients build their social network, something that they cannot do in their roles:

*"It's a liability when you are probably introducing one client with another client and something goes wrong. So honestly, I wanted something more professional. And for me, it was very helpful, the Together Project, in the sense of becoming the social network of my clients."*

Similarly, settlement staff mentioned a selective approach in making referrals, focusing on clients who need support that they cannot provide:

*"When I was referring clients, it was mostly for social support and English practicing, you know, it was kind of my main idea because this is something that it's difficult for us to do always, you have to keep the boundaries with the client."*

*"Many immigrants they need to improve their language. So, they take the English assessment and, after that, we need to refer them to the language classes or English"*

*improvement classes, but there aren't available seats for these people because there are long waiting lists. So, I refer them to the Welcome Group volunteers. These people [help] with improving their English. So that's one of the main services they really help with the clients and save my time."*

## Assistance Provided

Settlement staff provided several examples of the type of support provided by the volunteers. Volunteers helped newcomers practice English, navigate the healthcare and education systems, and provided assistance with day-to-day tasks such as understanding local customs (e.g., what constitutes a typical school lunch), and practical knowledge such as using public transportation. Volunteers also assisted with paperwork, the search for employment, helped with moving, and engaged the newcomer children in extracurriculars and other activities.

*"The group of volunteers helped them find new housing and facilitated the furniture."*

*"The volunteers help clients to fill out an application for the food bank, [they] help the families with registering the kids in different activities and the nearby library or nearby community center."*

*"When it comes to navigating services like health care, they [the volunteers] have provided support with that, they've provided support with extracurricular activities, for example, during spring break or Christmas break. They've been amazing for providing that service. Just generally socializing, you know, like a lot of the newcomer youth experience isolation."*

*"They help a lot with the language barrier, they help with employment. And also, above all, they just help the family to feel that they belong to this country. They show that you come up with the good side of the Canadian community and how we are a multicultural community and everyone is welcome here."*

## Impact on Workload

Settlement staff's responses concerning the impact of the volunteers' support on their workload varied. Some staff reported that volunteers reduced the frequency of direct interactions with clients. For example, one staff member noted:

*"The family will not be needing as many check-ins or asking for the attention [from the caseworkers] because the volunteers are filling that need of providing direction or support or information for the newcomer. And this results in the easing of the tasks for the caseworker."*

The support provided by the volunteers was especially appreciated by several staff members who reported heavy workloads, and a few staff members noted that volunteers were often in a better position to provide a faster response:

*"I was super satisfied and I really thank them because the workload was very high for me and there was a need for some kind of specific service and the Together Project helped me a lot with that."*

*"The Welcome Group helped them out with many things especially because I was super busy with the other clients and that client needed too much attention. So, the Welcome Group helped them with access to many resources, for example, to food banks and practicing English; if they had any doctor appointments regarding the translation. This was a great support for me as well."*

*"So that person [the client] doesn't have to stay waiting for us because we don't have one or two families so there's bunch of families who work with us. So, they receive the service sooner than waiting, you know, and sometimes they are waiting for us for weeks to get us attached to them but the Welcome Groups help them solve their problems probably sooner than us."*

In addition, one settlement staff noted how the interactions with the volunteers helped newcomers become clearer and more specific about their needs, which positively impacted the newcomers' interactions with the caseworker:

*"[The volunteers] provide a lot of resources, a lot of information; the clients, they are more clear on what they need and what they want and what kind of support they need from the caseworker. So, they are more specific when they are engaged with the Welcome Group."*

On the other hand, other settlement staff members noted that the volunteer involvement led to increased coordination needs and occasional duplication of efforts, which added to their workload. At times, newcomers might bring the same issues to volunteers, who may not be aware that caseworkers have already initiated steps to resolve these issues. This lack of awareness can lead to inefficiencies and confusion, as volunteers might not know that some processes take time to be resolved:

*"So it'll happen that there's a family with complex needs. The volunteers will be sending a lot of emails to the caseworker: What has been done about this? Has this medical referral been made? Is there going to be a walker arriving for the family soon?"*

*"We had a lot of double the work for the caseworker; the volunteers would be working on the same thing that the caseworker is doing."*

*"Usually, we receive a lot of emails from the Together Project about matches, asking or discussing the needs of the family. So that I believe, in some cases, increased a little bit the work of caseworkers or the counselors."*

*“Sometimes the communication may add more work to your caseload. Because you have to respond to somebody else. But I think it comes from the beginning how you just kind of establish your dynamics with the group about how you're going to work together.”*

One interviewee explained that the potential for extra workload seemed to have consequences, making some caseworkers more reluctant to refer clients to the Welcome Group program:

*“Some people, they don't want to refer to the Welcome Group Program because sometimes it implies more work. You know, you have to write down more emails, you have to take more calls, you have to have more meetings. For me, [it] has been worth it. Because at the end of the day, I'm just thinking about the client.”*

Finally, one staff member noted that, while not common, in some cases volunteers' well-intentioned efforts could potentially backfire and create complications, especially if they attempt to tackle complex issues without the proper knowledge.

### Effectiveness of the Program

Settlement staff recognized the Welcome Group Program as very effective in helping newcomers navigate their new environments and integrate into the community. One staff member, reflecting on the program's impact, noted:

*“I found it a very effective and efficient program because, as I've followed up with my clients, and my clients really benefited [from] the program, their community navigation, providing them the orientation about the community, the health system, even job employment that the Welcome Group helped the clients with. So, when I talk to my clients, how they benefited from the program, they were very happy. So that's why I was going to refer more clients.”*

Several staff members found that a major strength of the program is that it connects newcomers to local services, resources, and information. For example:

*“The program is good at helping people connect to their local services. So, so their community centers, their libraries.”*

*“They [the volunteers] know about the community, the community centers, the services that the community is providing; that's a good source for the newcomers to be connected to, to help them.”*

Additionally, some staff members noted how the involvement of volunteers enhances newcomers' participation in activities and programs. For example:

*“We know that if we refer a family that has a volunteer group of volunteers involved [to a program, cultural or sports activity], there's a better chance that they're going to show*

*up for the activity because the volunteers also have that information and you know it's like, okay, we can do this, they will help organize it."*

Settlement staff also highlighted the importance of volunteers in facilitating social integration and networking among newcomers. For example, one staff member mentioned:

*"Volunteers help bring together families who speak the same language during workshops, facilitating networking and community-building among newcomers."*

Moreover, settlement staff emphasized that volunteers help to reduce the feelings of isolation often experienced by newcomers and make them feel welcome, increasing their sense of belonging:

*"Just taking their hand and then providing the time to speak is huge connection. They feel less weak because they have the access but they don't have the way to communicate that makes them feel very vulnerable and isolated. (...) The families develop a special relationship, there's a trusting relationship that they build and then from there on they become the speaking tongue for these families literally in the community, so I think that's huge."*

*"When they are connected with the family, the family will feel that they are welcome; these Canadian individuals they are providing a warm welcome, they just want to help them in any way they can."*

*"They [the volunteers] are spending their time, you know, to connect with this family, [who] obviously has a strong welcome feeling, you know, like people care about us, you know, coming here as a newcomers."*

*"It has been a great support from the welcome group, they're providing great support to the family, introducing them, especially if we are talking about their social integration, and also their social engagement and the sense of belonging."*

Finally, volunteers also empower newcomers to gain knowledge, confidence and independence, enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives and families. As one staff member observed:

*"I noticed that always the volunteers are there to provide information, resources to the clients. And, also, they help the clients to become independent."*

### Preferred Interaction Model

A common theme mentioned by settlement staff was that the best method of interaction, remote or in-person, depends on the newcomers' preferences and needs. For example, the following two quotes illustrate how newcomers may have different preferences:

*"I think some people prefer in person services, right? It's according to preferences and some people like more remote service."*

*"Some clients told me when I was asking them if they are interested to meet with a volunteer, they told me if online, I'm okay with the program, but if in person, no, I don't want to be in the in the program. So, some clients, they are shy, some clients they just don't want to be in person with someone they don't know. It's always like giving them the choice."*

In terms of the newcomers' needs, settlement staff mentioned that the specific challenges that newcomers faced also impacted the meeting format, and in the end, what matters the most is that their needs are met:

*"I guess it depends on the needs, right? Maybe one family needs more in person services. They would physically need a volunteer to go with them to different resources (...). And another person would maybe just need a phone translation or a phone interpretation. (...) So, I guess it just depends on what the families need."*

*"If the client doesn't speak the language, if the client doesn't have the knowledge, accompaniment might be needed sometimes. Or sometimes they have a mental problem and they just want to sit with you in person and talk about it because they cannot deliver or transfer the energy to you through a phone call. So, they might need an in-person meeting."*

*"If we can provide the service as long as they are happy with that, it's okay. With this family, it was more of a hybrid. And they were happy with that. At the end of the day, all the client needs is just a service. They want their needs to get fulfilled."*

Several staff members noted, however, that certain families, especially those with low English, and technological skills, might benefit more from in-person interactions:

*"If a family has low levels of English or French, low tech skills and what we call low life skills, then they do better in person and they're not very interested in the in the match where they're just going to be talking to somebody on the phone."*

*"Some newcomers they, to be honest, they really need help with the in-person accompaniment and in-person support rather than the virtual because they're quite new with this technology and using these things."*

Furthermore, one staff member noted that, if remote interactions are used to communicate with newcomers with low technological or typing skills, phone calls are a better choice compared to text-based communication methods:

*"For clients who are not tech-savvy or lack typing skills, simple phone calls are recommended over text-based communication to ensure they can still benefit from volunteer interactions."*

Another factor to consider in remote interactions is access to technology. For example, a large newcomer family sharing a single cell phone may find it challenging to schedule remote interactions. However, staff members noted that remote interactions can also overcome transportation barriers, geographical distances, and harsh winter weather conditions:

*“Sometimes they don't even have money for transportation. This is something that needs to be resolved because they want to meet their volunteers. But if it's in certain place, they don't know how to get there. They don't have the resources to get there.”*

*“Most of them they live very far away so, I think it depends on the reason for the meeting and it depends on the client.”*

*“Hybrid is great. You know, a lot of newcomers don't want go out when it's minus 15 outside.”*

In conclusion, several staff members emphasized the value of the hybrid model for its flexibility and efficiency:

*“The hybrid format is a great addition because we can save time and money. You know, like kind of doing teletransportation. You're in the same place without the need of moving your body.”*

*“The things that I would leave is the hybrid.”*

*“I think, more in person is definitely helpful. Because my clients, some of them don't know how to use smartphones, not all of them, but just some of them. But, if in person is not available, virtual is also not bad an idea for them because you know, something is better than nothing.”*

## Responsive and Coordinated Services

Most staff members indicated that the Welcome Group Program improved their capacity to offer responsive and coordinated services to refugees. They emphasized the program's strong organization, supportive collaboration, and the dedication of the volunteers:

*“We've worked side by side. And I feel like it was a shoulder that we could lean on. For the things that we couldn't provide support.”*

*“It's well organized and they take the time to train their volunteers. And, you know, the volunteers tend to be very caring people, supportive and caring people. So, it makes a difference.”*

*“This program is really good and it's really a good approach and the team, the staff, the volunteers, all of them are very friendly and they are, they are willing to help. And they're very caring.”*

*"I have a really good experience working with the Together Project because they're very knowledgeable and a very passionate volunteers."*

Overall, settlement staff believed most newcomers are satisfied with the program. However, they also noted that satisfaction could be lower in some cases due to unmet expectations from newcomers:

*"I think that newcomers are very appreciative of people giving their time."*

*"The majority of families that are enrolled in the program, they're happy with the program. There are some cases that they weren't happy, but that I believe, [it] was because of the expectations of the client, because they were expecting that the volunteers will have a magic stick and solve all their issues."*

*"Sometimes the newcomer goes in with unrealistic expectations. A common request will be help me find a job. I would like the volunteers to help me find a job."*

Another reason for lower satisfaction among newcomers is the delay between onboarding and volunteer matching, which can decrease engagement:

*"I believe it takes a while from Together Project until they find the suitable volunteers for this family. The waiting time also impact how interested the clients are, how happy the client is with the matching. Because between the onboarding and the matching, if it wasn't really within a reasonable waiting time, I believe even that, that the needs of the family will change. And maybe they will find all their challenges that they faced before they are right now they're okay with it. So there is no need for even the welcoming group."*

*"Sometimes, it takes a lot of time to find a volunteer for the client. So, when it takes a lot of time, well then the client is not even interested (...) At that time, the client already knows everything and they already can, you know, can navigate the services himself."*

One staff member also expressed concerns about how long wait times reflect poorly on their own credibility:

*"I look bad and you know when the client come to me [and says] I didn't use the service because I didn't find it useful. No one called me. You told me that someone would call in six weeks. It's been more than three months. It's been more than four months and no one contacts me. Sometimes it affects our liability, you know?"*

## Recommendations

Settlement staff provided several recommendations to enhance the Welcome Group Program's effectiveness.



## Communication and Coordination

One suggestion was to improve the communication and coordination between the caseworkers and volunteers to prevent service duplication and ensure that volunteers are aware of the ongoing efforts by caseworkers.

*"We have to improve the communication. I think some volunteers, they have great leadership skills. So sometimes they just do things without us knowing. And again, it's control, it's about providing a proper service, no duplicate services."*

*"The piece of advice is coordination obviously. To just make sure that the services aren't doubling and then just focus on the things that are actually in the immediate needs."*

One staff member suggested that once the intake is complete, there should be a collaborative review of the client's needs identified during the intake. This would ensure all parties are informed and can provide more targeted and effective support:

*"I think that the intake once the intake is done, they have to like sit down with us and probably share with us what type of needs that a client came up with for them in their intake."*

A staff member also noted the importance of communicating client status updates, particularly when transitioning out of the program or when volunteers end their involvement.

*"I think probably something that we need to improve you, know we they're, kind of like leaving a client, you know, closing the file or something like that. They can kind of like share these updates about what happens."*

## Role Definitions

Another suggestion to improve the program was to ensure clear definitions of roles and expectations for caseworkers and volunteers, and to also communicate these to the newcomers. This way, newcomer expectations can effectively be managed and professional boundaries can be maintained. For example, the following quote illustrates the importance of respectful and clear communication to ensure that volunteers understand their roles:

*"I think this is a part of very clear communication. It's an exercise as well as communication from your side, you know, politely you can say this is not your role, we appreciate what you're trying to do, but just keep in mind that I am the one who is doing the case management part."*

The following quote highlights the importance of communicating the role division between volunteers and caseworkers to newcomers:

*“Newcomers do need to know when it's appropriate to ask the case worker and when it's appropriate to ask the volunteer because the caseworker is not always going to be around, but possibly the volunteers not always going to be around either.”*

### Volunteer Recruitment

Many staff members, while recognizing the challenges in volunteer recruitment, emphasized the need for a larger pool of volunteers who speak the languages of the clients. This would help reduce wait times between onboarding and match start:

*“Sometimes [it is] very difficult to find volunteers because the point is finding volunteers [who] speak the same language that the client speaks.”*

*“I think the they need more volunteers in the relevant language.”*

*“If we can work on the waiting time, that's also where I would improve. I know it's a challenge because sometimes we're working with families that speak very unique or rare languages that no one speaks (...) The recruitment process of the volunteers is hard.”*

In this context, one staff member suggested considering smaller Welcome Groups, especially when matching volunteers with smaller households:

*“Well, I don't think it's always necessary to have 5 people involved. Like if you're waiting to create a group of 5 people. Especially if you're matching a single person, you have a group of 3 people, [that is] good enough.”*

### Timing of Matches

A related theme mentioned by settlement staff is the timing of the matches in the settlement journey of newcomers. Several staff members indicated that a match immediately after refugees' arrival may be too overwhelming. For example, one staff member noted:

*“I wouldn't match the family once they arrived here because (...) when they come they are at one of our shelters and when they are in the shelter, they can't think about anything than housing. And they can't accept any kind of support than housing and they will focus only on housing. Once they move out they need some time also to settle in their house to understand what are their needs maybe after three months, or after even two months, I'd say it's good time to be matched not during that first month.”*

Another staff member mentioned that there may be potential for duplication of efforts, especially during early matches:

*“When you match people right at the beginning, you risk duplication of services. So, you risk that the volunteers are doing the same work as the caseworkers. So, it could work if*

*there's excellent communication between the caseworkers and the volunteers. But then you run the risk that you're adding to the workload of the caseworker and the caseworker is going to be there saying, no, I don't want this. Because I'm just having to all the time be updating the volunteers as to what steps I've taken."*

However, the same staff member also recognized that effective matches between volunteers and newcomers can occur at different stages of the resettlement process, each requiring sensitivity to the timing and the individual needs of the client:

*"There can be wonderful matches either like from the beginning and there can be wonderful matches further on down the line. I think they both can work. But it's just different things you need to be aware of and sensitive to, depending on what time, at what point the match starts."*

### Awareness and Support

Another suggestion provided by a staff member is to distribute flyers in multiple languages to increase awareness about the program among newcomers:

*"I believe it would be very helpful if there would be any fliers in different languages (...) so our counselors can provide this information to the clients when they are in the shelter. Because it's important that the client understand that there's this kind of program available for them when they move off to their house."*

Finally, a staff member also suggested that training and support for volunteers is important, especially for handling complex issues or mental health challenges among newcomers:

*"I think they need to make sure that the volunteers feel like they are supported and where they need to communicate to the right channels inside the Welcome Group in case that they have some crisis or they are kind of disturbed or something that they learn from the client, you know? So, I think this is very important. You know, some kind of like a training. And I think they have got better in that."*

## Conclusion

### Does the Program Achieve Its Expected Outcomes for Refugee Newcomers?

Overall, the results suggest that the Welcome Group Program achieved its expected outcomes. Newcomers in both match types were more likely to have someone to talk to about their problems. They also improved their ability to access services and resources, particularly among those in remote matches who reported limited access at the start of the program. Settlement staff also recognized this improvement, noting that one of the program's strengths is its ability to connect newcomers to local services, resources, and information.

While newcomers in hybrid matches felt that they had received more support from the volunteers, in terms of solving their challenges and meeting their settlement needs, both match types reported similar results. While newcomers continued to face some challenges, they found that they had made clear progress toward their integration priorities.

Furthermore, the Welcome Group Program was able to reduce social isolation and build a supportive social network for newcomers. Newcomers in both match types reported that they had met people in their community who share their interests and enjoy the same social activities. The results from the newcomer interviews also suggest that the social connections with the volunteers have the potential to develop into friendships that extend beyond the program. Furthermore, the interviews with newcomers and settlement staff suggest that newcomers not only form connections with the volunteers but also with others in the community, due to improved English language skills, increased confidence, and greater awareness and participation in social activities.

Newcomers in both match types also felt more connected to their communities and reported similar levels of community participation at the end of the program. While newcomers reported already high levels of feelings of welcome at the beginning of the program, these feelings of welcome were maintained and, for those in hybrid matches, heightened further. From the perspective of settlement staff, the volunteers play an important role in making newcomers feel welcome and increase their sense of belonging.

While overall the outcomes were similar for remote and hybrid matches, the results suggest that in a few areas, the hybrid model outperformed the remote model. In particular, over time hybrid match newcomers significantly improved in having people who support them in the community, social connections and their ability to make informed decisions about their life in Canada, unlike remote match newcomers. Similarly, from the perspective of the volunteers, the hybrid model led to more social connections with the newcomers and other volunteers.

Finally, it should be noted that the Welcome Group Program's impact extended beyond the support provided to newcomers, positively affecting volunteers and the broader community. Volunteers in both match types reported significant personal growth from their experiences, gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and newcomer integration. Additionally, the hybrid model in particular allowed volunteers to help build more welcoming and integrated communities. Also, a large percentage

of volunteers in the hybrid matches felt that they had made a meaningful difference in the newcomers' transition to life in Canada.

### How Do Refugee Newcomers, Volunteers and Settlement Staff Perceive the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Remote and Hybrid Support Models in Meeting the Needs of Newcomer Households?

The hybrid support model was generally perceived as more effective, particularly for its in-person interactions. Newcomers in hybrid matches consistently rated these interactions very highly in terms of effectiveness. This perception was shared by the volunteers, who found the in-person interactions of the hybrid model highly effective. For remote interactions, newcomers in both match types provided similar effectiveness ratings at the middle of the program. However, at the end of the program, newcomers and volunteers in hybrid matches reported higher effectiveness of remote interactions compared to those in remote matches. This suggests that the combination of in-person and remote interactions may enhance the perceived usefulness of remote support.

In terms of efficiency, newcomers in both match types found remote interactions similarly efficient at the middle of the program. At the end of the program, newcomers in hybrid matches rated the efficiency of remote interactions higher than newcomers in remote matches. Volunteers in both match types, however, viewed the efficiency of remote interactions similarly. Regarding in-person interactions, newcomers in hybrid matches rated these very similar in efficiency as remote interactions, but volunteers in hybrid matches found in-person interactions less efficient than remote interactions.

When asked to directly compare remote and in-person interactions, newcomers in remote matches typically perceived remote interactions as more efficient or saw no significant difference, suggesting a preference for or comfort with their primary interaction mode. This pattern also appeared in their effectiveness ratings, with a significant portion favoring or seeing no difference in the effectiveness of the remote interactions. In hybrid matches, many newcomers tended to view in-person interactions as more efficient or reported no difference, similarly reinforcing their comfort with the in-person interaction mode. This preference extended to their perceptions of effectiveness, where in-person interactions were often rated as more effective or equally effective compared to remote interactions. However, there were two exceptions to these trends: approximately 26-32% of newcomers in hybrid matches found remote interactions more efficient, indicating that a substantial proportion of hybrid match newcomers appreciated the benefits of remote interactions. Additionally, at the 6-month mark, some remote match newcomers found in-person interactions more effective.

The post-match interviews with newcomers provide further insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of the remote and hybrid support models. When newcomers were asked to directly compare in-person to remote interactions, several newcomers thought that in-person meetings were more effective but, at the same time, appreciated the efficiency of remote interactions, and mentioned that the choice of the meeting format ultimately depends on a client's needs. This was also echoed by settlement staff who emphasized that the best meeting format depends on the needs and preferences of newcomers, and they recognized the additional flexibility of the hybrid model in allowing clients and volunteers to choose between the two meeting formats.

Overall, these results suggest that while in-person interactions are typically seen as more effective, remote interactions are often viewed as more efficient. By incorporating both types of interactions, the hybrid model is particularly useful as it provides flexibility to adapt to the needs of newcomers (and volunteers), enhancing both the effectiveness and efficiency of the support provided.

### What Existing Technologies Are Most Effective in Delivering the Program's Intended Outcomes for Newcomers?

Messaging platforms such as WhatsApp stood out as the most commonly used technology among newcomers in both match types. While newcomers in both matches considered these effective at the middle of the program, at the end of the program, newcomers in hybrid matches rated messaging platforms as considerably more effective than newcomers in remote matches. A similar pattern emerged for the perceived effectiveness of video calls (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom), which were used by approximately half of the newcomers in both match types. Newcomers in hybrid matches rated the video calls as more effective than newcomers in remote matches throughout the program. This perspective was also shared by the volunteers in hybrid matches, who provided higher effectiveness ratings for video calls compared to volunteers in remote matches.

Phone calls were also used by newcomers, especially among those in hybrid matches, who rated them as very effective throughout the program. While newcomers in remote matches rated phone calls as effective at the middle of the program, at the end of the program, this perception dropped. The volunteers in both match types did not report using phone calls as often as the newcomers, and provided mixed effectiveness ratings. Other technologies such as text messages and emails were less commonly used by newcomers and volunteers and also showed mixed results in terms of their effectiveness.

Overall, these results suggest that the combination of in-person and remote interactions in the hybrid model enhanced the effectiveness of remote technologies, particularly messaging platforms, video calls and phone calls.

### Which Newcomer Client Groups are Best Suited to Benefit from the Remote or Hybrid Support Models? Under What Circumstances Do These Client Groups Benefit Most from Each Model?

The choice between remote or hybrid support models for newcomer client groups depends on their preferences, needs and circumstances. Remote interactions are particularly beneficial for newcomers who have to balance work and family responsibilities (i.e., childcare), as they offer flexibility and convenience. Remote interactions are also helpful for newcomers and volunteers who live far apart and for newcomers for whom transportation may be challenging, especially during harsh weather conditions, as they reduce the need to travel.

On the other hand, the hybrid support model is particularly suitable for families with low English proficiency or those unfamiliar with technology, where the in-person component can significantly enhance communication and provide necessary hands-on support. Furthermore, in-person interactions

also seem more effective for addressing specific challenges such as healthcare navigation, legal issues, or important appointments.

### How Efficient and Effective is the Program in Supporting the Delivery of Settlement Services?

The Welcome Group Program is effective in enhancing the delivery of settlement services to newcomers, as indicated by most staff members. The majority reported that the program improves their capacity to offer responsive and coordinated services through its well-organized structure, supportive collaboration, and the dedication of its volunteers. Volunteers play an important role in connecting newcomers to local services, resources, and information, which not only helps to address their integration priorities, but also improves their social integration.

However, the perception of the efficiency of the program in supporting the delivery of settlement services was more varied among settlement staff. On the one hand, many staff members appreciated the volunteer support, noting that it reduced the frequency of their direct interactions with clients, lightening their workload. This was particularly valued by staff who faced heavy workloads, as volunteers could often provide faster responses to newcomer needs. Additionally, interactions with volunteers helped newcomers articulate their needs more clearly and specifically, enhancing their subsequent interactions with caseworkers.

On the other hand, some staff pointed out challenges that affected the program's efficiency. Increased coordination needs and the duplication of efforts were mentioned, which added to the staff's workload. Problems can arise when newcomers discuss the same issues with volunteers and caseworkers at the same time. This can cause potential confusion and inefficiency, especially when volunteers are not aware that caseworkers have already initiated actions to solve these issues. Also, while not common, if volunteers attempt to address complex issues, despite their good intentions, they may complicate the situation if they lack the necessary skills to solve these issues.

In conclusion, while the Welcome Group Program is effective in enhancing the settlement support provided to newcomers, its efficiency in this regard is at times mixed, reflecting both significant benefits in workload management and some challenges in coordination and communication between volunteers and settlement staff.

### Recommendations

Several recommendations for improvement emerged from the program evaluation. For example, the post-match interviews revealed that volunteers and newcomers often had frequent meetings at the start of the program, which over time became less frequent or on an as-needed basis. This suggests that for some matches the program could adopt a more flexible approach, tailoring the match length to the changing needs of newcomers.

During the post-match interviews, some newcomers wished they had known about the program earlier. Addressing this issue, one settlement staff member recommended increasing the visibility of the program by distributing flyers in multiple languages soon after refugees' arrival, which could help raise awareness.

Staff also emphasized the importance of the timing of the matches in newcomers' settlement journey. They noted that while effective matches can occur at any time, the matching requires sensitivity to the newcomer's readiness and circumstances. If matches are made too soon after their arrival, newcomers might feel overwhelmed, and there might also be a chance of duplication of efforts by caseworkers and volunteers.

To improve service delivery, settlement staff suggested better communication and coordination between caseworkers and volunteers. This could ensure that all parties are updated on the ongoing efforts aimed at supporting the newcomer household and prevent service duplication. One staff member suggested this could involve reviewing the clients' needs together after intake.

Furthermore, another recommendation shared is to clearly define the roles and expectations for caseworkers and volunteers, and to communicate these to newcomers. This could aid with the maintenance of professional boundaries and help manage expectations among all parties about the support provided. In this context, some volunteers also mentioned the importance of encouraging newcomers to ask for and accept help to be able to provide more effective support.

Another recommendation provided by settlement staff was to expand the volunteer pool to include more individuals who speak the clients' languages, which could significantly reduce wait times between onboarding and match start, and improve newcomer engagement and satisfaction with the program.

Finally, another topic raised was the importance of providing volunteer training and support, especially for volunteers who may be confronted with complex cases or mental health challenges among newcomers. In line with this, the volunteer surveys revealed that about 60% of participants found the support during the matches useful, thorough, and timely, suggesting that there is some room for improvement.