

**Employers, Employment Services and Community Stakeholders Consultation Report**

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Rural Pathways for Newcomer Women in Grey Bruce

United Way of Bruce Grey & Welcoming Community Grey Bruce

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- Service providers, economic development officers, Chambers of commerce staff, and everyone who helped distribute the surveys
- Volunteers who assisted the women in completing the survey

### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide the Employer Sub-Committee with a summary of the key themes that surfaced during the surveys and interviews with employers, employment services and community stakeholders in Grey Bruce.

The report responds to the project activity related to employer engagement. The research was designed to answer the following questions:

- What barriers do VMNW face on their pathways to Employment in Grey Bruce?
- Are there gaps or new strategies in our local service delivery system to address the needs of VMNW seeking employment?
- What programs, services, interventions and supports best meet the needs of these job seekers and local employers interested to hire VMNW?
- How can employment and training services in Grey Bruce help VMNW get and keep their jobs?
- What are the best collaboration practices for building capacity in the employment and training sector?

### **How to Read and Review this Report**

As the project coordinator responsible for engaging with the employment sector, I have provided you with a summary of the key findings plus some personal reflections. As you review and read this report, take the time to consider these questions:

- What is resonating? What isn't resonating?
- What questions come up for you?
- What is missing?
- What further clarification do you need?
- What is the data telling you?
- What conclusions can you draw?
- What are the implications for moving forward with strategies?

### **Methodology**

The primary data source for this report has been surveys and key informant interviews. The necessary information to answer the above questions was obtained by:

- Identifying the barriers that challenge or prevent VMNW from securing and retaining employment;
- Exploring the skills, competencies and characteristics that employers seek in the employees they hire;
- Identifying gaps in our service delivery system;
- Making recommendations about how to:
  - Build capacity in the employment and training service industry;
  - Help employers with information on accessing/attracting potential employees from VMNW group.
  - Educate and inform employers about contribution VMNW make;
  - Best prepare VMNW for their job search in Canada;
  - Help VMNW to access training and education opportunities
  - Help VMNW to navigate and access employment and training services

The surveys and interviews attempted to identify the experience and factors that influence employers of Grey and Bruce to hire VMNW.

The surveys were distributed online through Survey Monkey, social networks, and also promoted in collaboration with project partners like local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development groups, and Employment agencies. Eleven respondents filled the survey on site; they were also interviewed for the project.

**Participants**

Employers and business managers who live and employ in Grey and Bruce were the target for the Employer survey. We also targeted a small percentage of the employers who live in Grey Bruce, but employ outside the region. The Employer survey consisted of 16 questions. Seventy-nine employers of Grey Bruce completed the survey.

We decided to create a separate survey for the employment service providers in Grey Bruce. Their valuable work and experience have a unique perspective as they work with both: employers and people seeking employment. Here we asked not only managers, but all staff to respond to the survey.

Nine Employment Service Providers from Grey and Bruce completed the survey. Seven of them are employment counsellors working directly with clients, and two are the managers of employment agencies. All of the counsellors have recent or past experience working with VMNW clients.

Key interviews and both surveys are confidential, but respondents had the option to enclose their information to stay in touch with the project.

As per project plan, interviews were conducted with employers to identify strengths, service gaps, training needs, opportunities for collaboration to address employment, integration needs and barriers of VMNW. We decided to interview employment service providers and community stakeholders in Grey Bruce. Their valuable work and experience have a unique perspective as they work with both: employers and people seeking employment. By contributing to the engagement dialogues, all participants helped to identify strengths, gaps in service, employment barriers and training needs to shape the recommendations for future VMNW employment programming in the Grey Bruce. Some individuals expressed their interest to participate in our project, others were selected for a one-on-one interview because of their expertise. The interviews took no more than an hour and used the same questions as the surveys. The participants also had the option to share their personal experience working with VMNW employees/clients.

We were expected to interview at least six employers. In total, there were 11 employers, 7 employment service providers and 9 community stakeholders interviewed. Each interview was reviewed to identify themes.

11 one-on-one interviews were conducted with business owners or managers either at their workplace or by telephone.

An Employment Service Provider offers a range of resources, supports and service components to respond to the career and employment needs of individuals and the skilled labour needs of employers, and can help individuals on a path to higher skill training and employment. The five components of the Employment Service provide a highly flexible tool kit of services that can be customized to a client's particular needs.

Community Stakeholders is defined as people, groups, organizations or businesses that have interest or concern in the community. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the community's actions, objectives and policies. Some examples of key community stakeholders are residents, community groups, developers, government workers (and the agencies they represent), business owners, neighborhood leaders, commission members and other groups from which the community draws its resources.

### **Limitations**

At the time of the consultation, the region has a total of 18,294 registered business, 11,709 in Grey and 6,585 in Bruce County (Statistics Canada, 2019). Unfortunately, the employer survey was not able to reach most of the Employers in Grey Bruce. This represents the challenge of connection in a rural region where communities widely spread out.

Employers, especially those without experience employing VMNW may not identify their needs for training and supports. This may reflect the current situation in our region: people may not know what they need if they never had experience in hiring new immigrants in general and VMNW in particular.

## Findings

### Strengths and Opportunities

#### *Experience in employing VMNW*

The majority of Employer survey respondents (54) have never employed VMNW, and only 14 indicated that they presently employ from this group. Nine businesses have employed VMNW in the past.

From the Employment Service Provider survey, only two respondents have recent experience helping VMNW clients, and five have helped in the past.

Sector	Number of employers with current or past experience	Number of employers with no experience
Not for Profit Agency	6	4
Service	6	13
Public Sector	3	5
Manufacturing	3	7
Wholesale & Retail	3	5
Construction	1	3
Academic Institution	1	1
Health Care/ Social Assistance	-	5
Agriculture/Farming	-	2
Religious Denomination	-	1
Financial Institution	-	-
Other*	-	9
Total	23	54

\*Other includes "Transportation and Tourism", "Real Estate Commercial Leasing", "Sole Proprietorship with 2-3 employees", "Industrial service contractor", "Electronic help Service", "I am retired", "Hotel", "Early learning Program"

Employers' experience in employing visible minority newcomer women by sector



The overall experience of those who presently employed VMNW or employed in the past is positive. This is a strength and opportunity to build on. Some positive comments from those who presently employed or employed VMNW in the past are:

*“They are good and learn fast employees”.*

*“We hired a lovely VMNW as a contract replacement for an employee on leave. She has been a pleasure to have in the office and has been an efficient employee who has picked up things quickly”.*

Employment Service Providers in Grey Bruce already have some current or past experience helping VMNW clients. Through interviews, ESPs shared that they had positive feedback from employers who described newcomer women as motivated, dependable and reliable employees. They stressed the fact that in general newcomer women have better adapted to new workplace settings and learned faster than newcomer men in similar situation.

#### *Employer’s Openness to hire VMNW*

With a labour market shortage in Grey Bruce, many employers are open to hire from VMNW group to fill vacancies with qualified candidates. Answering the survey, six ESPs expressed the opinion that employers’ openness to hire from VMNW group is more than average. At the same time, many respondents expressed interest in hiring employees from WMNW group. Some even commented that they would be happy to pay for the language training and other trainings require to enhance the skills of their employees:” *We will sponsor costs for language or other training to support increased job skills and knowledge”*

During interviews, ESPs and Stakeholders shared the opinion that local employers gradually become more open to hire VMNW, but there is still a long road to go. In rural settings, they would benefit from information on accessing/attracting potential employees from this group. They expect for the situation to improve with more candidates moving to Grey Bruce from larger urban centres.

*Benefits of hiring VMNW*

The Four County Labour Market Employer 1 Survey in 2019 showed many local businesses struggle to hire and retain qualified employees.

From a local employer's perspective, the top benefit of hiring VMNW would be filling vacancies with qualified employees. The other benefits would be making their workplace more culturally diverse, and potentially increasing the diversity of their customers, especially for service and retail industries. The respondents also think about the benefits of enhancing their business with international experience, and the benefit of having dedicated and hardworking employees from the newcomer group.

Only two respondents think that there is no benefit of hiring VMNW. Those respondents also followed through their comments that there is no difference between VMNW and other group of employees.

Benefit	Number of respondents	Percentage
Fill vacancies with qualified people	58	77.33
They bring cultural richness to the workplace	43	57.33
They increase the diversity of our customers	39	52.00
They are resilient and willing to work hard	35	46.67
They bring international experience	33	44.00
No benefit	2	2.67

Benefits of hiring visible minority newcomer women identified by employer

**Barriers/ Gaps in Service***Report on Barriers from Employers and Employment Services*

The respondents of both surveys identified limited language as the top barrier to employment for VMNW. From the Employers' survey, the other barriers are: Professional Accreditation (28) and Lack of Canadian work experience (20). None of employers mentioned discrimination as a barrier to employment for VMNW. Besides language barriers, Employment Service Providers indicated the following barriers to employment for VMNW: Transportation (5), Lack of Canadian Work Experience (3), Professional Accreditation (3), Discrimination (3).

Barrier	Number of respondents
Language Barriers	59
Matching Credentials with Canadian Standards	28
Lack of Canadian Work Experience	20
Discrimination	0

Types of employment barriers identified by employers

Barrier	Number of respondents
Language Barriers	7
Transportation	5
Lack of knowledge of Canadian workplace culture	3
Professional Accreditation	3
Discrimination	3

Types of employment barriers identified by employment service providers

### *Language Barriers*

In terms of challenges in hiring VMNW employees, the respondents from both surveys indicated that Language presents the major barrier to the employment of this group. The interview data supports this finding. All three groups (employers, ESPs and Community Stakeholders) agreed that language barriers present the major challenge for VMNW seeking employment. Although an entry level job does not require advanced English language skills, Employers stated that they need to feel confident that the employee can understand instructions from supervisors, understand mandatory Health and Safety training and be able to apply the training in the workplace. If on-the-job training can be delivered through demonstration, lower levels of English skills are required. If training has considerable verbal instructions and if the job interacts with customers and clients, employers stated that higher level of English is required.

During interviews, ESPs also commented that employers often have biases related to language culture and applicant's accent.

### *Professional Accreditation/Matching Credentials to Canadian Standards*

During interviews and completing the survey, Employers, ESPs and Stakeholders shared that matching foreign credentials to Canadian standards presents one of the major challenges:

*“We hire VMNW once they have established Canadian credentials”*

Some of ESPs mentioned that they would be interested to learn more about professional accreditation process in Canada.

*Lack of knowledge of a Canadian workplace culture/Canadian work experience*

This was one of the top barriers recognized by all three groups. When interviewed in detail, employers specified that VMNW applicants were lacking soft skills entering their workplace. Employers observed that VMNW often lack understanding about what professional behavior is required at the workplace and when applying for a job. ESPs confirmed that this is not uncommon.

*Employment Law*

This finding emerged during interviews: employers shared that some applicants from VMNW group did not understand employer expectations about workplace standards and Canadian Employment law. They reported that employees from VMNW group insisted to be paid by cash and also were surprised to see deductions on their pay cheques, showing their unfamiliarity with income tax, EI and CPP.

*Limited Transportation and Child Care options*

All three groups agreed that transportation presents a major barrier to employment in rural community settings. ESPs and Stakeholders also think that a lack of available day care can limit VMNW in their choices.

*Social Isolation/Limited Social Connections*

A sense of isolation and limited social connections affects self-confidence and self-esteem negatively influencing job interview performance.

During interviews, ESPs and Stakeholders indicated many job seekers from VMNW group had lack of self-confidence and self-declared mental health issues due to isolation and lack of social connection. Both groups commented that VMNW applicants required extra coaching on resume writing and especially on interview.

*Limited understanding of workplace diversity and the barriers experienced by VMNW*

Employers reported different understanding and experience on barriers experienced by VMNW. Here are some comments from the employer survey respondents:

*“There is no difference. Some employees whether VMNW or not will take positions*

*and then leave due to varying reasons.”*

*” There is no difference in employing new residents to Canada or those currently in Canada except the transfer of qualifications*

Comments of other employers:

*What supports does your business offer for VMNW as employees?:*

*“Same as other employees of same value”*

*What would be the most helpful for you as the employer to hire and retain Visible Minority Newcomer Women?:*

*”Same as hiring a none visible minority woman.. all are equal”*

*Do you have a workplace diversity policy and/or committee?:*

*“Not applicable and in my opinion shouldn’t be needed... if you qualify and can do the work then should be treated as such”*

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

*“Segregation! Equal for all- minority or not! Stop segregation!”*

### *Discrimination*

During interviews and completing the survey, some ESPs expressed the opinion that discrimination is one of the top barriers for VMNW to access employment in Grey Bruce. This finding was confirmed by Community Stakeholders during interviews.

Discrimination and racism contribute to many settlement challenges for VMNW. Women can feel isolated, even if they are surrounded by people, due to racial discrimination and language barriers, or the stigma associated with cultural differences.

On the contrary, the Women Survey data indicates that the biggest challenge perceived by the respondents in the two counties is different. For example, the survey results indicate that discrimination is the biggest challenge the respondents in Grey County faced when looking for work or starting a business, whereas to the respondents in Bruce County, the lack of Canadian education and experience was the biggest challenge

*Basic Job Search Tools/Skills*

In addition to limited social connections, Stakeholders and ESPs disclosed that VMNW often lack basic job search tools/skills and understanding of Canadian Job Market. Their VMNW clients required extra coaching on resume writing, job search options and interview skills.

*Lack of connection and Limited information on accessing/attracting VMNW employees and information*

One of employer survey questions is asking about employer’s awareness of supports: On the scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is not at all and 5 is high) how aware are you of supports and information for employers wishing to recruit newcomers?

The average level of awareness of supports to hire newcomers available in the area is above average, but there is a great discrepancy between the answers: the level of awareness ranges from 0 to 100%. The interesting finding is that employers who presently have VMNW employees tend to have a higher level of awareness about information and supports available than those who did not have such experience. More than 50% (27 out of 50) of employers with no experience in recruiting WMNW have little or no awareness of supports and information available in the area. Just a little more than 30% (9) of employers with experience in employing VMNW have a good level of awareness about available support and information.

	High level of awareness (35+ out of 100)	Some awareness (15-34 out of 100)	Low level or no awareness (0-14 out of 100)
Employers with present or past experience	9	5	7
Employers with no experience	18	5	27

Employers awareness of support and information about hiring newcomers

In the survey comments, many employers expressed the opinion that there is lack of qualified VMNW applicants in the area:

*“Difficult to attract to Owen Sound from GTA. Hesitation on public transportation, affordable housing, etc. “*

*“In our town and region, we rarely see any VMNW and VMNM. It appears that all*

*the newcomers are immigrating to bigger cities. We would welcome VMNW and VMNM as the unemployment rate is very low and it is preventing us from growing sales/jobs”.*

*“Did not hire this group- we did not have access to qualified individuals”*

*“We have not had any applicants”*

*“In my 7 years with the company we have never hired visible minority due to a low turnover rate and lack of applicants that fall into this category”*

At the same time, many respondents expressed interest in hiring employees from WMNW group. Some even commented that *they “would be happy to pay for the language training and other trainings require to enhance the skills of our employees.”*

However, the survey completed by local VMNW reveals that there are many educated VMNW in Grey Bruce: 70% of Women survey respondents have a College or University degree and struggle to find meaningful employment.

Even though during interviews, Employers expressed the interest to hire VMNW, employers and Stakeholders indicated that there is little or no information on accessing/attracting potential employees from this group.

When asked about hiring practices, employers with recent or past experience in employing VMNW and newcomers often think outside of the box using personal connections and creative thinking to fill vacancies with qualified candidates. One employer in Bruce County provides daily transportation for his employees who live outside of Grey Bruce. Some employers in Grey and Bruce counties even sponsored foreign workers using federal government programs to fill available positions in their restaurant and production businesses. Another thing the Rural Pathways project staff has discovered, some women, especially those with a language barrier, tend to support each other rather than seek support from service providers. They help each other to find work, or hire others of their cultural and/or language background. The concern here is that there is a lack of connection between qualified candidates from VMNW group and employers.

The barriers create opportunities for women, employers, employment services and other service providers to collaborate, not only to help women find work, but also to address the labour market shortage in the region.

### **Supports, Training Needs and Opportunities for Collaboration**

#### *Supports currently offered by businesses to VMNW as employees (Q10)*

The majority of businesses could offer mentoring with another employee as a major support, flexible work schedule and paid training/ internship. However, respondents commented that these supports are available for all employees and not specific to VMNW. Seventeen businesses indicated that they do not have any supports for VMNW employees.

Type of support	No of respondents
Mentoring with another employee	47
Flexible work schedule	32
Paid training/Internship	27
Onsite language support	4
Transportation	3
Non of the above	17

Supports currently offered by respondents of employer survey

#### *Workplace Diversity Policy/ Committee*

The majority of businesses that responded to the survey (52.63%) do not have a Diversity Policy or Committee:

Answer choices	Number of respondents	%
No	40	52.63
Yes	22	28.95
Do not know	12	15.79

Existence of Diversity Policy or Committee reported by respondents of employer survey

Four respondents commented that they have a workplace practice that promotes equality, but not a formal committee that promotes diversity.



*Top requested supports to hire and retain VMNW employees*

46 employers who completed our survey requested more ESL opportunities as a top support. During interviews, stakeholders and ESPs also expressed the need for more available ESL training opportunities in Grey Bruce.

Currently we have only a few ESL schools available in Grey Bruce, and they mostly run by volunteers. There is a hope for the structured ESL training with upcoming Settlement Services that plan to run ESL services by September 2020.

ESPs also expressed the need for **translation/interpretation services** as an important resource to help their VMNW clients.

Both employers and employment service providers mentioned matching credentials with Canadian standards as one of the top challenges (#2)

In the Women's Survey, respondents identified lack of Canadian work experience as the top barrier to employment. Lack of Canadian work experience is also on the top list of the challenges identified by employers and employment service providers. Both employers and Employment Agencies named training grants or paid internship as one of the top supports they would appreciate. It could also help individuals to obtain valuable Canadian work experience and be an opportunity for collaboration between employers, employment service providers, and other service provider organizations.

Supports	No of respondents
More ESL opportunities	46
Training grants/Paid Internship	34
Information for legal working requirements for Immigrants	26
Assistance with accrediting foreign credentials	22
Workshops on building welcoming workplace	20

Supports requested by employer survey participants  
to hire and retain VMNW employees

Supports	Number of respondents
Grants to support paid training	4
Workshops on workplace diversity and supporting newcomers	4
Employer Information exchange and mentoring opportunities	1
Assistance with accrediting foreign credentials	1
Childcare	3
Social Connections	3
Transportation	2

Supports requested by employment service provider survey participants to hire and retain VMNW employees

All three groups indicated that workshops on cultural diversity would help to better understand the culture and needs of VMNW. It will enable all partners to support the women helping them to overcome employment barriers. Here are some examples of comments to the Employer Survey question *“What kind of information sessions or training workshops would you like, in order to build your capacity working with newcomer women? (Q14):*

*“diversity training for all staff communication workshops for working with VMNW “*

*“Welcoming Supporting Retaining”*

*“Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace training”*

*“understanding how best to integrate Training for current employees on compassionate and inclusive workplace culture”*

*“How to help new comers and employers be aware of customs, language barriers etc.”*

*“I would be interested in learning what their roadblocks/stress points are for entering the workforce and how, as an employee, I could alleviate those.”*

Employers indicated that having more training grants opportunities would be a great support to hire VMNW. There are many grant opportunities already available in Grey Bruce, so employers can access this information and apply for the grants being connected to employment agencies. Employers also requested the information on legal working requirements for immigrants.

Some ESPs came up with the idea to develop a Resource/ Information centre for employment service providers, employers and newcomers, including VMNW and others who support newcomers, could access the information about jobs, training and other resources available in Grey Bruce. Many employers are already providing mentoring programs and paid training/internship for new employees at their workplaces. The opportunity is to customize a mentoring program for VMNW considering their training needs and workplace expectations.

Employers can also consider developing flexible work schedule for VMNW employee, so women can attend ESL classes to improve their language.

Employers, ESPs and Stakeholders think that VMNW would benefit from workshops on Canadian workplace culture and employment law.

Employers also stressed the importance of computer skills as essential tool for the day-to-day operation at the modern workplace.

One employer, based on his experience, expressed the need for the money and currency training.

ESPs shared that many of their VMNW clients started from low-level positions that did not match their career and education. So along with learning about the basic job search tools as resume, cover letters and interviews, we can develop a tool for career exploration and decision making , including: choosing a long term career, finding a job, acquiring skills, researching job options and understanding a local job market.

Employment Service providers offered to use the same approach/model that was used for the clients with disabilities, customizing it for the VMNW clients.

In addition, ESPs and Stakeholders expressed the opinion that women would benefit if they receive support with childcare and social connections, transportation and professional accreditation. It will require bringing more community partners and services to the table in order to create successful pathways to employment for VMNW.

### **Considerations for Further Discussion**

The differences in understanding of barriers faced by VMNW shows that there may be a need for employers to understand the difference between equity and equality. People often mix them. Some survey respondents stressed the fact of equality, but is it really fair?

Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equality aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help. Equity and equality are two strategies we can use in an effort to produce fairness.

For people who do not have the same experience it might be necessary to provide more help in understanding the reality of newcomers in general and VMNW specifically.

The workshop on Canadian workplace culture can describe the workplace culture as the unwritten rules for behavior and communication that employers expect from employees. The workshop can be enriched by practical everyday scenarios that VMNW will face at the workplace and resource materials that reinforce key messages learned at the workshop.

As the part of the training for women, the partners can develop workshop tools on Canadian Employment law, covering the variety of topics such as employer and employee rights and responsibilities as defined in the Employment Standards Act, Workplace Health and Safety Act, Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Violence Laws, Human Rights Act, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Income Tax.

All service providers and partners supporting newcomers can provide referrals to free tax clinics and other community resources to help VMNW understand how their taxes are calculated and what the process is for filing tax returns.

There is an opportunity to develop a better connection between employers, employment service providers and WMNW seeking employment.

### **Conclusion**

It was a challenging task reaching out to employers in Grey Bruce. Rural communities have many challenges on their own that make experience of VMNW even harder:

- Geographic isolation
- Lack of public transportation
- Poor infrastructure
- Poverty and unemployment
- Low educational attainment
- Cultural and social differences, stigma, and norms

This conclusion and themes identified in this report include reflections on my lived experience and social identity, coming to Grey Bruce as a new immigrant woman.

The best practice for building support is focusing on how success will benefit the community. It is essential to communicate that newcomers in general, and VMNW specifically, are integral to the diversity, economic development and sustainability of Grey Bruce. Partnerships, either formal or informal, are key to making progress. These partnerships are most effective when there is a commonly defined vision, which brings together potential institutional and community stakeholders to develop shared goals and actions.

Visible minority newcomer women face multiple barriers to labour market entry and career advancement. Addressing these barriers requires that women, employers, employment service providers, and other service provider organizations, community groups, and community members work together.

The barriers create opportunities for women, employers, employment services and other service providers to collaborate, not only to help women find work, but also to address the labour market shortage in the region.

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