HREMF Reducing Racism and Discrimination Barriers for Newcomers Project Brief

Background

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) seeks to build the capacity of the settlement and integration sector by offering meaningful professional development opportunities and providing a centre for knowledge and expertise. Through training and research, AAISA supports the work of its member agencies and professionals working with newcomers in enabling the successful settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. However, there are several barriers which prevent newcomers' success; racism and discrimination being some of the most pernicious. To address these barriers, AAISA took a proactive approach and embarked on a project to provide settlement practitioners with tools, resources and training to combat racism and discrimination. This project, Reducing Racism and Discrimination Barriers for Newcomers, was funded by the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund (HREMF) and was executed from July 2014 – January 2016. AAISA created an online Learning Community (www.aaisalearns.ca) and delivered training through Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Anti-Racism. The development of the Learning Community and the Module were informed by interviews, focus groups, surveys and an environmental scan, served to increase the ability of settlement practitioners to recognize and reduce race-related barriers for newcomers.

Rationale

Racism and discrimination are difficult to identify and address, as it is subtle and requires an understanding of social location. Individuals' social location reveal their social status, access to resources, rights and benefits, given based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability and religion.[1] When individuals' characteristics do not align with the dominant group's characteristics, they are typically disempowered or marginalized.[2] Consequently, the effects of racism and discrimination can be detrimental to the settlement and integration outcomes newcomers. The negative impact of these barriers has been particularly marked in the area of labour market outcomes.[3]

The ability of settlement practitioners to recognize and reduce the racism and discrimination barriers their clients might experience requires the appropriate tools, resources and training. Research conducted for this project revealed the opportunity to advance the anti-racism and anti-discrimination work of settlement practitioners through the development of a community of practice, or Learning Community. The Learning Community includes a centralized resource database and a platform for the exchange of best practices and knowledge. The Learning Community was complimented by the delivery of Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Anti-Racism, a part of the Settlement Practitioner Training and Accreditation (SPTA) curriculum. Embedding the online tool into AAISA's Professional Development framework attracted 56 additional Learning Community users from the Multiculturalism, Human Rights and Anti-Racism module.

Methodology

In order to develop the Learning Community and Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Anti-Racism, AAISA conducted thirty-nine interviews and three focus groups with professionals from the settlement, non-profit, education, private and public sectors in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Red Deer and Lethbridge. An environmental scan was also produced with the objective of identifying anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives and resources in Alberta. The interviews, focus groups and environmental scan informed the compilation of resources and functionality of the Learning Community. The Project Advisory Panel and the AAISA Professional Development Committee also provided their expert advice and insight and were an integral piece to informing the design of the Learning Community. This feedback was gathered through surveys prior to the official launch of the tool at AAISA's 8th Biennial Settlement Conference.

In addition to the official launch, the Learning Community was initiated as a complimentary tool to AAISA's training through the delivery of Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Anti-Racism to 56 participants. The two-day training was offered in Calgary and Edmonton with participants from across the province. Participants utilized the Community Forum to complete assignments and access key resources. Forty five participants responded to a post-training survey that sought to measure change in knowledge and behaviour in regards to anti-racism and anti-discrimination, as well as the utility of the Learning Community as a platform for blended learning. Additional evaluation for the Learning Community was conducted through a post-training interview and focus group with participants.

Results

Based on the data gathered from the post-training survey, interviews and focus group, the Reducing Racism and Discrimination Barriers for Newcomers Project achieved the following through the Learning Community and Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights and Anti-Racism:

- Increase in awareness of how racism affects settlement and integration
  - o 91% of participants reported that they had moderate to extreme improvement in their knowledge of how racism impacts individuals and families.
  - o "Before the training I tended to believe racism was only coming from individual bias or prejudice. However, after the training I realize the racism can be personal but also can be cultural and institutional." – Module 2H Participant
  - o 89% of participants indicate that they had moderate to extreme improvements in their ability to recognize and analyze racism.

- Increase in knowledge of settlement practitioners to respond to racism in their work
  - o 89% of participants reported that their ability to recognize and deal with racism and stereotyping improved as result of the training.
  - o "For myself, while I have the educational background to recognize and understand racism, the gap is the ability to deal with it. This course was extremely practical and filled that final gap of putting

understanding into action." – Module 2H Participant

- Settlement practitioners have increased capacity to address race-related challenges for newcomers
  - o 82% of participants report that they feel the racism training has positively impacted their ability to transition their learning into practice.
  - o Course learnings that participants have found as most useful to bring to their settlement practice were "ways to neutralize negative comments", "understand my own place of privilege," "being mindful of social location" and "how to be an ally".

- New connections and relationships are developed among settlement practitioners
  - o 60% of participants indicated that they moderately to extremely agree that the Learning Community has enhanced the racism-training module.
  - o The practitioners from the post-training interview and focus group reported that there is great value in having an online learning community to connect practitioners across Alberta. They indicated that this value would particularly benefit professionals in more remote areas of Alberta to build relationships with other settlement practitioners across the province. Another reported advantage of the Learning Community is its capacity to provide practitioners with information which addresses emerging areas in their practice. Finally, the interview and focus group participants shared that they would utilize the Forum to post questions about their practice to the community, thereby enabling sharing of best practices and on-the-ground knowledge.

Going Forward

Since the delivery of Module 2H: Multiculturalism, Human Rights and Anti-Racism, AAISA has continued offering blended learning, through both in-person and online training. AAISA's Learning Community has been used as a platform for the online training through participation in the Community Forum for the Module Working with Immigrant Seniors. In future modules, professionals taking AAISA training will utilize the Community Forum to discuss assignment questions, resources and best practices. The Community Forum is also a place where professionals can network and build new connections. Additionally, the Learning Community offers the Resource Centre which enables not only learners, but the general public to access key research, tools, information around a variety of topics surrounding the successful settlement and integration of newcomers.

The Learning Community will also serve to improve the quality of AAISA's research, as a platform to gather data from users through the Community Forum. AAISA's Research Unit will continue to gather tools and resources that will benefit the settlement sector in the areas which affect newcomer outcomes and the settlement practice. This sustained effort will ensure that the Learning Community will have the most up to date information on the settlement and integration system.

Going forward, AAISA will seek to expand the Learning Community from beyond a resource centre and forum to a Learning Management System (LMS). This evolution would enable users to register for courses, complete professional development portfolios, and access learning reports which would ultimately streamline their certification process as Settlement Practitioners.[4]

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[1] "Glossary." Cultural Safety: Module Two. Accessed January 30, 2016. http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/courses/csafety/mod2/glossary.htm.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Block, Sheila, and Grace-Edward Galabuzi. Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and The Wellesley Institute, 2011. Accessed May 20, 2015. http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Colour_Coded_Labour_MarketFINAL.pdf.