CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH THE COVID-19 LENS:

HARNESSING INNOVATION AND MOBILIZING BEST PRACTICES

FOCUS AREA: COMMUNITY RECEPTION & INTEGRATION

IN BRIEF

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for settlement and integration agencies as they seek to foster welcoming, inclusive, communities that support the long-term integration of the newcomers they serve. While the transition to <u>virtual programming</u> has often diminished newcomers' social connections to the community, the pivot in services has also necessitated many swift adaptations and innovations by settlement and integration agencies which have engendered new best practices and opportunities for shared capacity building.

The Capacity Building Through the COVID-19 Lens Project seeks to capture and mobilize these best practices through key focus areas. This brief seeks to summarize the key findings of the two community reception and integration focus groups hosted in October 2021, and in January 2022.
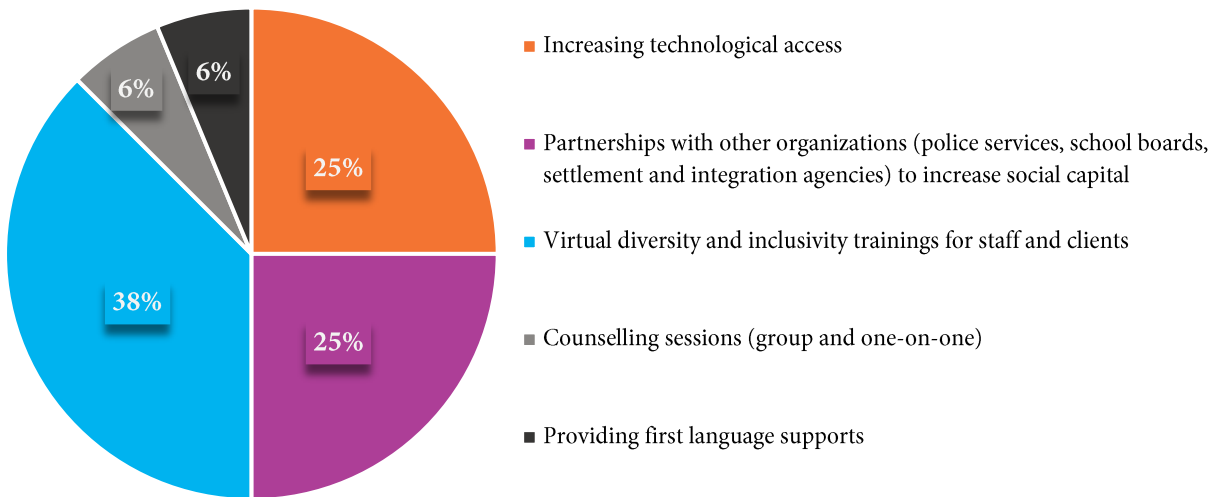
Please note that underlined terms throughout the brief can be found in the **Glossary**.
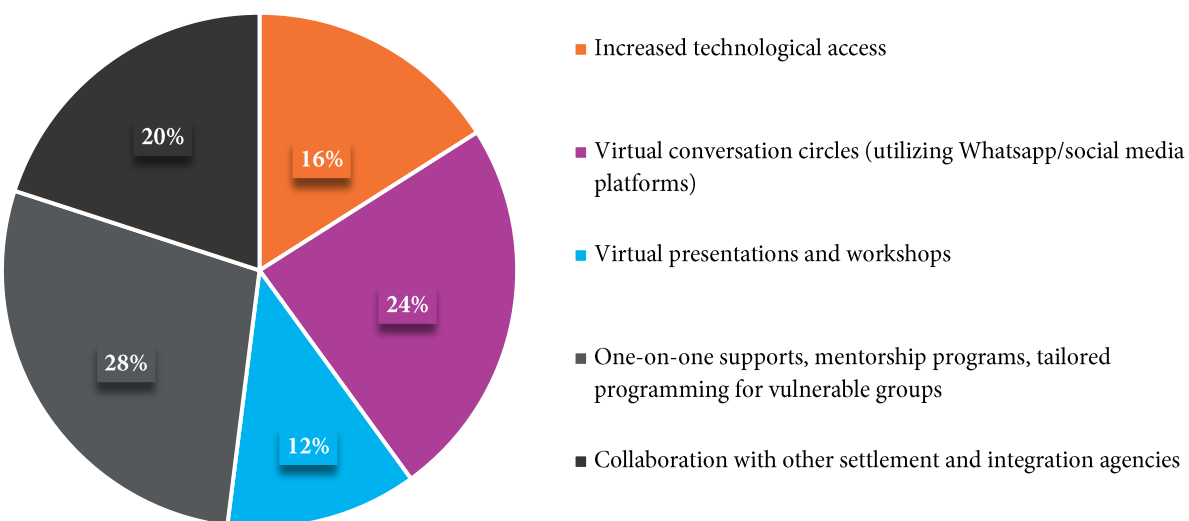
KEY FINDINGS

BEST PRACTICES

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Best practices utilized to address **racism and xenophobia** amidst the public health context for both communities at large, as well as clients include:
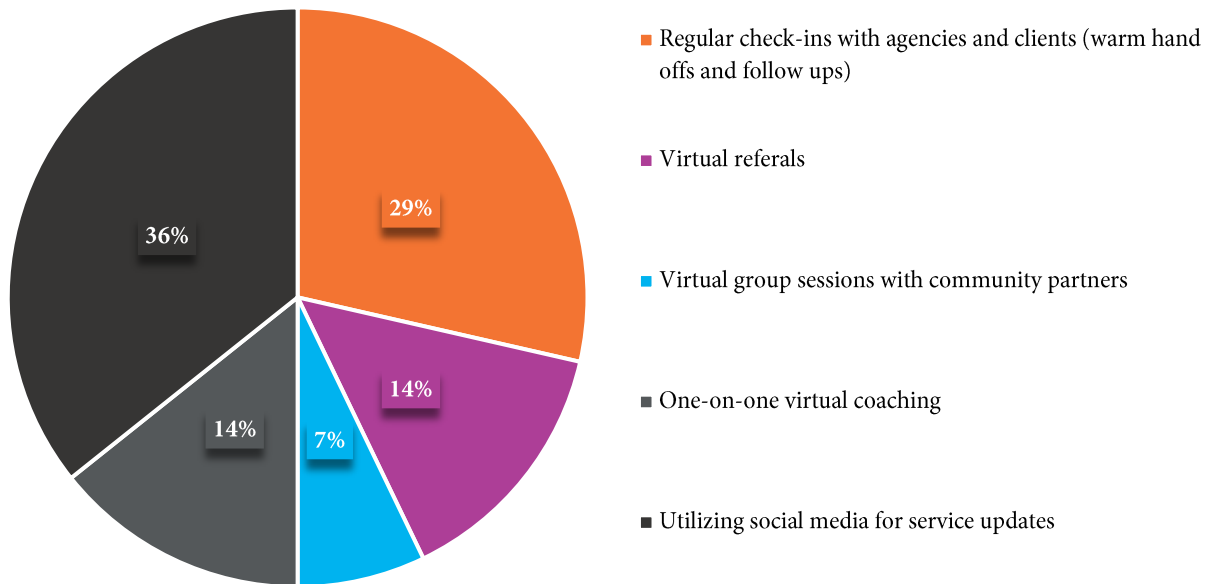

- ■ Increasing technological access

- ■ Partnerships with other organizations (police services, school boards, settlement and integration agencies) to increase social capital

- ■ Virtual diversity and inclusivity trainings for staff and clients

- ■ Counselling sessions (group and one-on-one)

- ■ Providing first language supports

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Best practices utilized to **increase community connections and intercultural understandings** include:

- ■ Increased technological access

- ■ Virtual conversation circles (utilizing Whatsapp/social media platforms)

- ■ Virtual presentations and workshops

- ■ One-on-one supports, mentorship programs, tailored programming for vulnerable groups

- ■ Collaboration with other settlement and integration agencies

Best practices that have been used to adapt **community outreach in the virtual world** include:

- Regular check-ins with agencies and clients (warm hand offs and follow ups) — 29%
- Virtual referals — 14%
- Virtual group sessions with community partners — 7%
- One-on-one virtual coaching — 14%
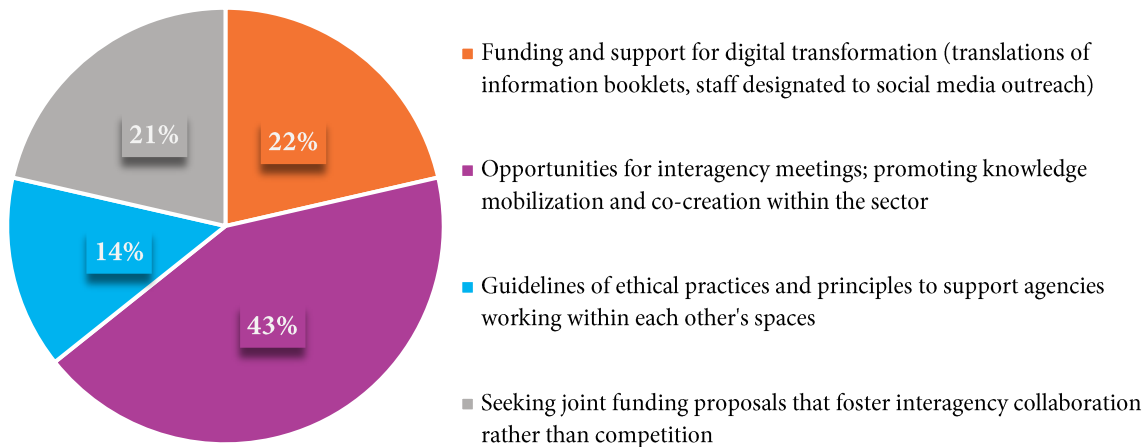- Utilizing social media for service updates — 36%

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Best practices to **increase access to essential services** (e.g. translation and interpretation services, healthcare, vaccination clinics, childcare, banking, supports for children and youth engaging in online schooling, mental health challenges, etc.) include:

- Offering translation services (plain and first language documents available, utilizing the Language Line) — 40%
- Utilizing social media apps (Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook) to promote service updates — 4%
- One-on-one counselling, and cross-cultural counselling — 23%
- Increasing technological access — 3%
- Partnering with other community agencies and SPOs — 23%
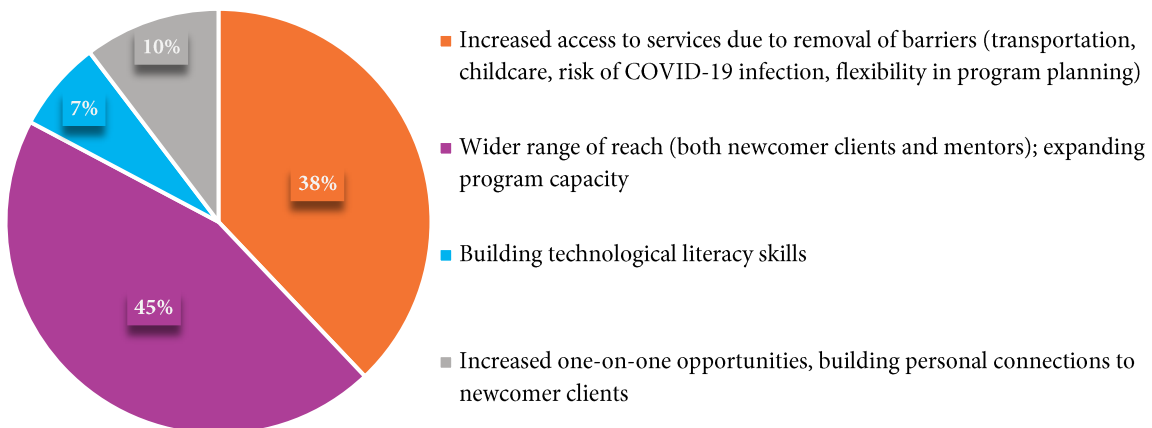- Regular check-ins with newcomer clients to maintain positive relationships — 7%

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF COMMUNITY RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION SERVICE DELIVERY PROVIDERS

Emergent needs of community reception and integration service delivery providers to support professional development and success of <u>hybrid</u> community reception and integration course delivery include:

- Funding and support for digital transformation (translations of information booklets, staff designated to social media outreach)

- Opportunities for interagency meetings; promoting knowledge mobilization and co-creation within the sector

- Guidelines of ethical practices and principles to support agencies working within each other's spaces

- Seeking joint funding proposals that foster interagency collaboration rather than competition

POSITIVE FEEDBACK REFLECTING THE TRANSITION OF IN PERSON TO VIRTUAL PROGRAM DELIVERY

Benefits of implementing <u>hybrid</u> and online service delivery include:

- Increased access to services due to removal of barriers (transportation, childcare, risk of COVID-19 infection, flexibility in program planning)

- Wider range of reach (both newcomer clients and mentors); expanding program capacity

- Building technological literacy skills

- Increased one-on-one opportunities, building personal connections to newcomer clients

The positive feedback received from both newcomers and community reception and integration service providers include an increase in opportunities for **intercultural learnings and understandings.** Despite the reduction to in-person community outreach events, community integration agencies have received positive feedback in the implementation of both <u>virtual and hybrid</u> program opportunities (e.g., cooking classes, conversation circles) as it allows for flexibility in scheduling yet creates opportunity for personal connections to be formed within the community. The utilization of **social media platforms** has pushed agencies to increase their digital understandings and connect with newcomers in a less formal manner. By creating a **social media presence**, settlement and integration agencies have **increased access to information for newcomers** and fostered an informal dialogue for newcomers. An overarching theme identified in this first focus group was that newcomer serving agencies have identified **strong positive outcomes from partnering with broader community organizations** (e.g., Police services, school boards, agencies dedicated to serving vulnerable groups, etc.) as it increases social capital. Developing these strong relationships has also created a foundation for warm hand offs during referral processes and continual check-ins on newcomer progress.

NEXT STEPS

The findings identified from the two rounds of focus groups will be leveraged to support the creation of multi-media professional development resources for service delivery providers. These resources will include step-by-step guides, infographics, research briefs, as well as a training video for each focus area. The training video will be created in alignment with AAISA's certification program, where service providers can institutionalize these emergent best practices. The development of these resources is created with the intent to capture the innovative practices that have arisen in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the adaptations created during this time are carried into the post-pandemic world of settlement and integration service delivery.

GLOSSARY

Hybrid courses: Hybrid courses refers to the practice of engaging a mix of both in-person course delivery as well as the use of <u>virtual programming</u>. It is a thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online environments to conduct teaching and learning. It is often used interchangeable with terms such as blended learning, mixed-mode or flexible learning. It is usually based on specific needs, capacities, modalities and pedagogies of a particular institution or sector. This term is synonymously with the term <u>blended learning</u>.

Virtual programming: Virtual programming is a form of distanced learning that is conducted completely over the Internet. It refers to newcomer and direct service agencies participating in courses virtually, through the internet and without the need of attending in-person courses. It can be performed both asynchronously or synchronously, depending on the instructor and/or course. This term can be used synonymously with <u>remote learning</u>.