

REPORT

BREAKING BARRIERS

SUPPORTING DIVERSE & 2SLGBTQI+ NEWCOMERS

February 5 & 6, 2025 | Saint John, NB



Overview

This annual Professional Development (PD) session, hosted by ARAISA for frontline staff of its member organizations, provided an opportunity to explore topics relevant to their work. The session was designed by and for frontline staff in the settlement and integration sector.

A total of 81 people attended the session in person, representing 26 organizations from the four Atlantic provinces—19 Anglophone and 7 Francophone.

Objectives

Why?

Frontline workers are essential to the capacity of all organizations in the settlement and integration sector. This PD session provided them with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of diversity. In turn, this knowledge-building enhances organizations' service delivery capacity and equips frontline staff with the tools and strategies needed to serve their communities effectively.

Expected outcomes:

This PD session's objectives were to provide participants the opportunity to:

- Deepen their understanding of diverse newcomers' barriers to accessing services, gain insight into the realities of 2SLGBTQI+ newcomers with safe support approaches, and learn tools for effective client service while maintaining their own well-being.
- Build relationships and strengthen networks among frontline staff across the Atlantic region, share best practices for service delivery in the settlement and integration sector, and recognize and celebrate the hard work of frontline staff.

Preparatory Phase

A Planning Committee, composed of frontline workers from ARAISA member organizations, met online five times to collaboratively determine the priority learning theme, topics, methodologies, and objectives for this PD session. They also provided subject matter expert (SME) recommendations to the ARAISA team.

The ARAISA team engaged the SMEs in both individual and collaborative preparatory sessions to ensure the content was relevant and to avoid duplication.

This year's theme was diversity, with a focus on the following topics: barriers to services, 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers, and mental health.

The Planning Committee members: Alice Keough, ANC; Chiamaka Uloeme, Ignite; Cynthia Mutijima, IFNÉ; Dana Alkilani, MAGMA; Jaime Ryan, ANC; Lina Dola, YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth, Centre for Immigrant Programs; Michael Mel, Réseau de santé Vitalité; Morgan Kelter, YMCA of Southwestern New Brunswick; Scott Smith, PEI Community Navigators; and Song Kim, PRUDE.

Program

Day 1



February 05, 2025

- KEYNOTE | Diversity, Supporting LGBTQIA+ Newcomers, and Mental Health by Laurabel Mba
- WORKSHOP | Practical Strategies for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Newcomers and Addressing Mental Health with Laurabel Mba
- PRESENTATION | Accessibility and Inclusion: Supporting Newcomers with Disabilities in Their Diversity by Sihem Ait Hammouda, OCASI
- Collective Conversations & Networking

Day 2



February 06, 2025

- Check-In and Previous Day's Recap with Laurabel Mba
- Introduction to 2SLGBTQI+: Galaxies & Pronouns Activities
- GUEST SPEAKER | Dr. Sulaimon Abiodun Olawale Giwa, Associate Professor & Interim Dean, Interim Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research, Cross-appointed to the Department of Sociology, Police Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

PRESENTATIONS

- Pre- and Post-Migration Experiences - Kimberly Offspring, YWCA St. John's
- Refugees Experiences - Rhiannon Makohoniuk & Orlando Tovar, RRANS
- Youth, and Rural Experiences - Ahrthyh Arumugam, YMCA Greater Halifax/Dartmouth, Immigrant Services

PANEL | Best Practices When Working with 2SLGBTQI+ Newcomers







- Moderator: Laurabel Mba
- Panelists: Ahrthyh Arumugam, YMCA Greater Halifax/Dartmouth, Immigrant Services, Kimberly Offspring, YWCA St. John's, Rhiannon Makohoniuk, RRANS, Dr. Giwa, MUN, Orlando Tovar, RRANS
- Group Activity: Case Studies & Scenarios
- Visualization Activity with Ahrthyh Arumugam

Session's Opening Daniel Rito, Director of Population Growth & Workforce Development at Envision Saint John, provided a warm welcome to the group to the region.

We acknowledged that we were gathering in the City of Saint John/Menaquesk located on the unceded traditional territory of the Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet, who have lived on these lands for thousands of years. Alongside the Mi'kmaq/Mi'kmaw and Passamaquoddy/Peskotomuhkati, they signed Peace and Friendship Treaties in the 1700s, protecting their rights to land and resources. These nations, part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, share deep ties with the Penobscot and Abenaki of Maine, in the region known as Wabanaki, or "Land of the Dawn."

Key Results

Experts shared many innovative practices and strategies on the key event topics. This was done through:

- **6** presentations¹ 
- **5** interactive activities and workshops
- **1** toolkit for service providers for 2SLGBTQIA+ newcomers in Nova Scotia developed by RRANS 
- **1** Galaxies Gender/Sexuality activity developed by Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights
- **1** panel on best and innovative practices 
- **1** visualization session 
- **1** cha-cha warm-up 
- **8** scenarios practiced in breakout groups over 2 days 



¹ All presentations and resources shared during the event are available in the "Resource Package."

Day 1 Scenarios:

Summary of Participants' Posters

Participants were given scenarios which each detailed specific examples of queer newcomers facing challenges. They discussed the barriers and potential solutions that they would implement.

Common barriers faced by queer newcomers across all scenarios:

- Hesitation to seek help over fear of discrimination.
- Feelings of isolation within their cultural community due to their identity not being accepted.
- Lack of support system.
- Lack of LGBTQIA+ resources.

Solutions that participants would put in place to support queer newcomers:

- Empowering newcomers by helping them understand their rights.
- Facilitating personal connections by directly introducing newcomers to supportive organizations, professionals, and safe social networks (e.g., accompanying them to queer community spaces, connecting them with mental health professionals, or introducing them to 2SLGBTQI+ support groups and newcomer-specific networks).
- Ensuring service providers understand intersectionality, prioritize clients' needs, and offer support that meets them where they are.
- Maintaining confidentiality while being mindful and selective when disclosing sensitive information related to sexual or gender identity.

Long-term steps to enhance inclusive and accessible service delivery and strengthen organizational capacity to support queer newcomers:

- Focus on building trusting client-staff relationships.
- Translate information on internal and external services and make it readily available to clients.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with other agencies.
- Offer ongoing staff training on Mental Health first aid, ASIST, and the intersections of queer newcomer identities.
- Be well-versed in realistic and accessible resources that could be available to the groups served.
- Document clients' experiences to advocate for increased organizational support, such as dedicated programs and funding.



Panel Best Practices When Working with 2SLGBTQI+ Newcomers:

Summary of Conversation

Moderator: Laurabel Mba

Panelists: Ahrthyh Arumugam, YMCA Greater Halifax/Dartmouth, Immigrant Services | Kimberly Offspring, YWCA St. John's | Rhiannon Makohoniuk, RRANS | Dr. Giwa, MUN | Orlando Tovar, RRANS

Panel questions:

1. How can people overcome the fear of inaction because of the fear of getting it wrong?
2. What best practices have you found effective in supporting 2SLGBTQI+ newcomers, and how would you suggest frontline workers implement them?
3. If you were to dream of a community of practice, what are some must-haves in order to best support 2SLGBTQI+ newcomers?

Summary of Panel Responses

Continuous Learning

- Acknowledge that fear and uncertainty can paralyze you.
- Be transparent about what you know or don't know, offer support, and engage with the people you're working with.
- Take a step back, reflect, and move forward, slowly if needed, with the tools, support, and knowledge you have.
- Discomfort and mistakes are part of the learning process—acknowledge them, be open to feedback, be humble, and focus on continuously learning and growing with the changes.

Intentionality, Accountability, and Flexibility

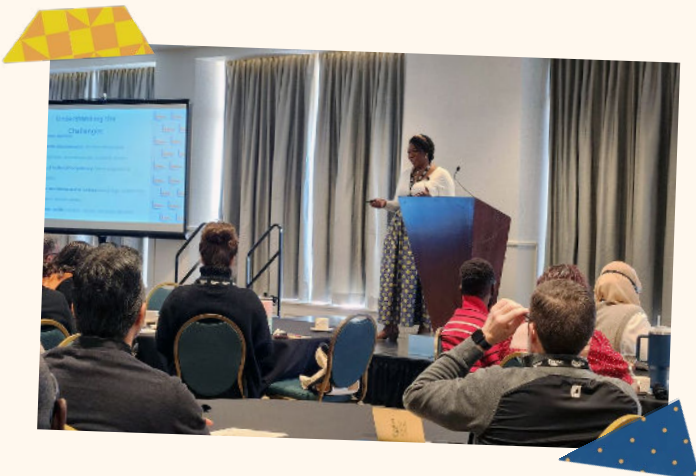
- Be intentional in your actions, commitments, and policies and procedures.
- Ensure policies and procedures are inclusive and hold you accountable.
- Embrace flexibility—adapt programming and services to meet 2SLGBTQI+ clients' complex needs, especially in collaboration with other organizations.
- Don't forget to leave room for joy and celebration!

Collaboration, Communication, and Community

- Open, cross-sector collaboration and communication are essential to support diverse communities.
- Share resources, knowledge, and feedback across sectors to avoid silos and foster meaningful connections.
- Listen to 2SLGBTQI+ clients' needs; they are the experts in their lives, experiences, and needs; work collaboratively with them.
- Support community-building efforts and advocate for infrastructure that sustains 2SLGBTQI+ community spaces.

Inclusion, Systemic Change, and Evolving Practices

- Work with the system, even if it is imperfect, so as not to lose people.
- Strive for intentional and empowered representation and inclusion.
- Representation must influence decision-making, and training should bridge gaps between frontline work and management.
- Challenge the language of “best practices” and shift toward more flexible, evolving practices that respond to changing needs, i.e. “better practices.”
- Welcome and incorporate broader perspectives, including Indigenous learnings, when building programming to improve service delivery.





Key Learning Takeaways

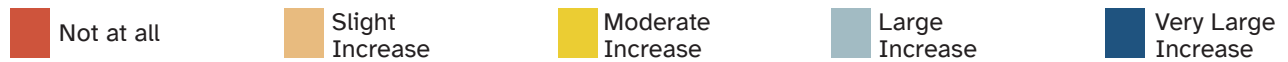
Compiled by

Laurabel Mba

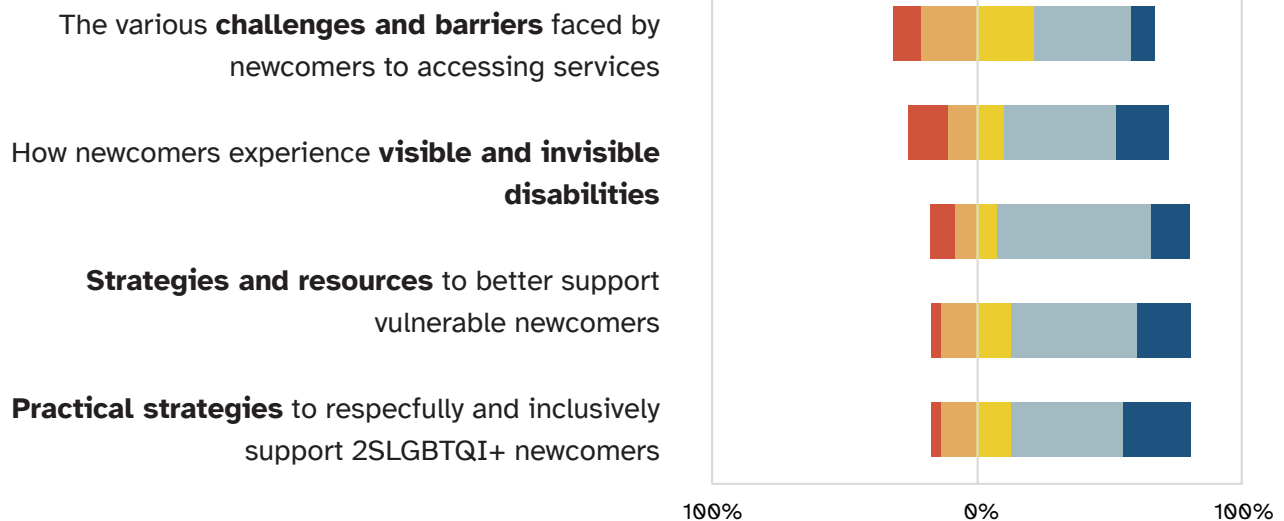
- **Accessibility & Support:** Understanding the difference between accommodations and true accessibility and Canada's targeted goals for inclusion.
- **Intersectionality:** Recognizing its complexity and importance in providing empathetic and effective support.
- **Active Listening & Empathy:** The role of asking the right questions, using empathy mapping, and ensuring safe spaces.
- **Collaboration & Resources:** Exploring interprofessional collaboration and the range of available support networks.
- **Practical Strategies:** Identifying barriers and developing strategies to navigate them while enhancing accessibility.
- **Lived Experience & Workforce Realities:** Valuing the perspectives of former newcomers working in the sector and emphasizing ongoing training for non-profit settlement roles.
- **Creating Inclusive Spaces:** Recognizing that spaces aren't inherently safe and normalizing pronoun sharing to foster inclusivity.
- **Gaps in Non-Profit Services:** Acknowledging that no organization can be a one-stop shop and the importance of bridging service gaps through external resources.

Participant Feedback

A post-event survey was shared with participants, and 19 responded with their impressions. **The overall event satisfaction rate was 100%**, with the following breakdown for each section:



QUESTION: To what extent did the workshop increase your knowledge of:



Participants' Quotes



"I have been taking training in this area and it supplemented what I have learned. Also a wonderful opportunity to meet other frontline workers to hear the struggles and successes."

"I found that I had prior training and education on many of the topics discussed, however the cases presented were excellent for reflection, and I appreciated learning about the various services available across NS and the maritime provinces."

"The information was great and the speakers were wonderful but, I felt like there could have been more practical advice on how to support."

"The speakers were great! They were passionate and clear."

Laurabel Mba's Recommendations

- Apply Intersectional Approaches: Ensure services and programs consider multiple layers of identity and lived experience.
- Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration: Connect with other organizations to share best practices, resources, and strategies for accessibility and inclusion.
- Improve Accessibility in Services: Assess current programs and physical spaces to identify and remove barriers.
- Continue Learning: Engage in further education on supporting queer newcomers, addressing mental health challenges, and preventing Western-centric approaches in 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion.
- Enhance Active Listening Practices: Implement strategies for asking better questions, acknowledging lived experiences, and fostering safer, more inclusive environments.
- Advocate for Better Training: Support ongoing education for staff in non-profit settlement roles to improve empathy, understanding, and service delivery

Acknowledgements

The ARAISA team would like to thank all Planning Committee members for their dedication and valuable contributions to the session's design.

A heartfelt thank you also goes to the presenters from across Atlantic Canada and beyond for joining us and sharing their expertise and insights with such passion:

- Ahrthyh Arumugam, Coordinator, Newcomer 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth Program, YMCA Greater Halifax/ Dartmouth, Immigrant Services
- Kimberly Offspring, 2SLGBTQIA+ Services Coordinator, YWCA St. John's
- Laurabel Mba, Founder & Lead Consultant, Laurabel Mba Consulting
- Orlando Tovar, Co-Executive Director, Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia (RRANS)
- Rhiannon Makohoniuk, Co-Executive Director, Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia (RRANS)
- Sihem Ait Hammouda, Coordinatrice Bilingue de l'Initiative pour l'Accessibilité / Bilingual Coordinator - Accessibility Initiative, OCASI
- Dr. Sulaimon Abiodun Olawale Giwa, Associate Professor & Interim Dean, Interim Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research, Cross-appointed to the Department of Sociology, Police Studies, Member, Royal Society of Canada, College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists, School of Social Work, St. John's College, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador



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