

THE SENSE MAKER

Explore the emotional palettes
of newcomers to Canada



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

another product from Grounded Space, March 2019

A Journey

***It's a journey ... that I propose ... I am not the guide ... nor
technical assistant ... I will be your fellow passenger ...***

***Though the rail has been ridden ... winter clouds cover ...
autumn's exuberant quilt ... we must provide our own guide-
posts ...***

***I have heard ... from previous visitors ... the road washes out
sometimes ... and passengers are compelled ... to continue
groping ... or turn back ... I am not afraid ...***

***I am not afraid ... of rough spots ... or lonely times ... I don't
fear ... the success of this endeavor ... I am Ra ... in a space ...
not to be discovered ... but invented ...***

***I promise you nothing ... I accept your promise ... of the same
we are simply riding ... a wave ... that may carry ... or crash ...***

It's a journey ... and I want ... to go ...

Nikki Giovanni

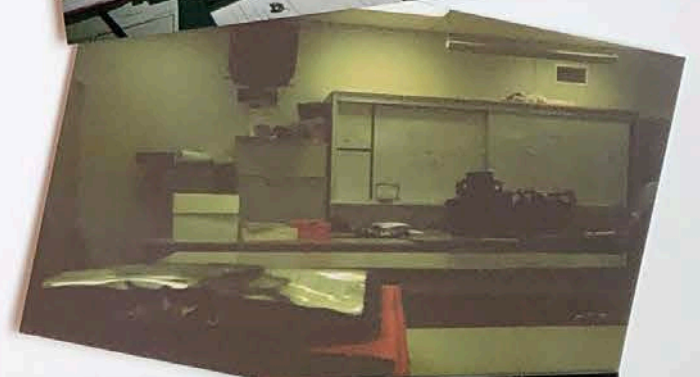
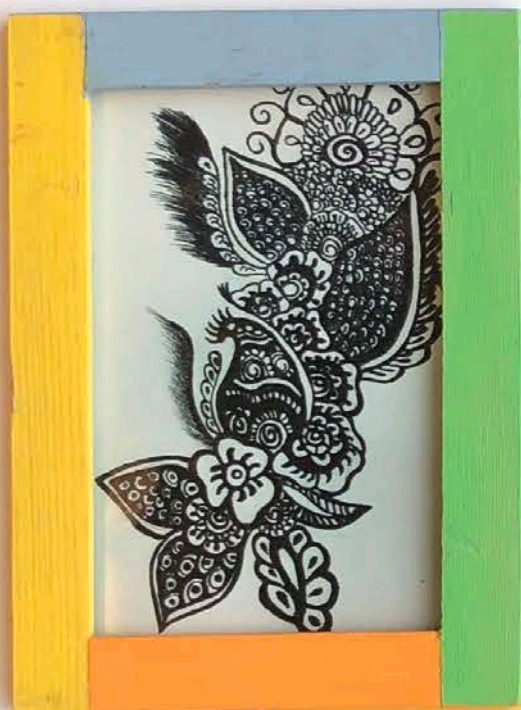


How is Home different than here? How is it the same?
 كيف يختلف منزلنا عن الذي هنا؟ وهل هما
 يشبهان بعضهما؟
 3

Tell us what you think we need to hear.
 أخبرنا بما نود أن نعرف.
 نحن نستمع. أخبركم بأن حياتنا حلوة
 وأما رأيهم فيها رأيتهم الناس الذين
 يعيشون في بيوتنا نحن شعبنا وولدنا
 من أجلهم. نحن نحبهم.
 2

أنا أحب الفاني ديتي يوم
 السمع الفاني ديتي حسب
 هاني مرثاة ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

بعض الروائع تعيد بنا الذكريات
 الجميلة أو الذكريات المظلمة
 بالخاصة، بالنسبة لي، لالهة زهرة
 الياسمين تعيد لي الذكريات
 الجميلة التي قضيتها
 في بلادي لسوريا. في فصل
 الربيع، تتفتح أزهار
 الياسمين وتتفتح عطرها في
 كل مكان، ولتعمل معها
 ذكريات مازلت أذكرها حتى
 هذه اللحظة.



What is a typical breakfast for you?
 ما هو الفطور النموذجي
 بالمناسبة لك؟
 البصية + زينة + زينة + زينة
 حبوب + قهوة + لبن + عسل
 لبن + حليب + حليب + حليب



What's the meal you make most often?
 ما هي الوجبة التي
 تصنعها غالباً؟
 (صنف)

What is a meal for celebration?
 ما هي وجبة الأعياد؟
 دبل + حلاوة الجب + بقلاوة
 + بيضا

Eman's perspective on newcomer life in Surrey:
 Photos & materials from our self-documentation kit



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Meet 20 of the 300,000+ newcomers who journey to Canada each year.

Eunica, Katrina, Eros, and Mary are four of about 87,000 family members who reunited in Canada in 2017. Wilson, Garo, Yasmin, Waad, Mande, Nasir & Rose, Eman & Abeer, Mohamed & Fadia are 11 of about 21,000 government assisted refugees accepted to Canada in 2017. Mohammed, Sefee, Haytham, Ola and Tamer are five of about 18,000 privately sponsored refugees who made their way to Canada in 2018.



Eunica



Katrina



Eros



Mary



Tamer



Welson



Garo



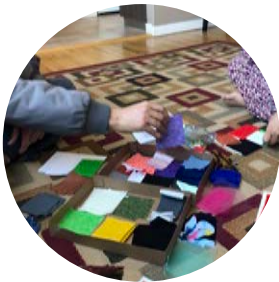
Yasmin



Waad



Mande



Nasir, Rose & Fer



Eman & Abeer



Mohamed & Fadia

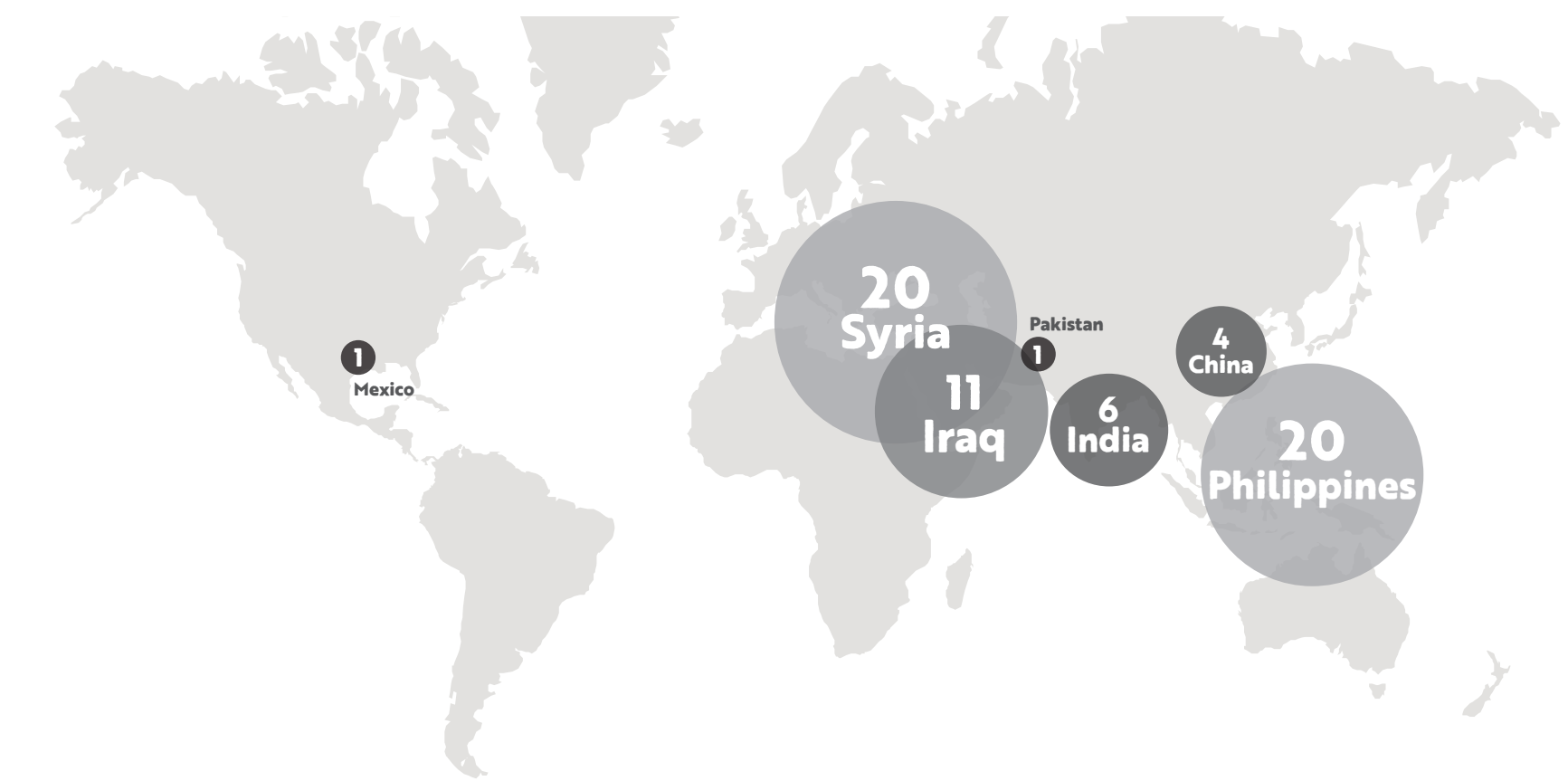


Mohammed, Ola, Sefee, Haytham

But, the journey to Canada isn't a simple saviour story.

Eunica felt happy to reunite with her mom and sad for the friends left behind. Mo & Fadia's initial relief turned to humiliation, and later, anger. Mohammed and his family describe feeling both profoundly hopeful and deeply worried, at the same time. As newcomers trade in the familiar for the unfamiliar, they recount gains coupled with losses. They are physically safe. And yet life is no longer as full of the people and places, tastes and sounds, rituals and celebrations that breed vibrancy and intimacy. Too often, the transition between there and here can render life a little greyer, a little duller, a little more muted, and a lot less full.

We've spent time with and captured stories from 65 newcomers ...



Along the way, newcomers toggle between vibrant and muted lives.

For some newcomers, a life of full colour is a distant memory: before war, before displacement, before uprooting for family or for the promise of a better future. For now, life can feel subdued and small. For others, greys and beiges characterized the life left behind. They are seeking rays of colour.

Having volume or depth of sound



"Playing soccer here is the most wonderful thing in my life."

- Tamer



Rich in experience

Vibrant (of sound) strong, resonating



"Once a month for an hour, at the friendship centre, I meet friends I rarely see. We

- Fadia

Full of energy and life



Not lacking in any essential

Vibrant (of colour) bright & striking

"It's a struggle to do normal things, because you feel like a foreigner. It feels like you need to prove something just to be considered an equal. Feels frustrating, alienating to not be able to be yourself."

- R



Small

- Having comparatively little size or slight dimensions
- Minor in influence, power, rank
- Operating on a limited scale
- Lacking in strength
- Limited in degree
- Reduced to a humiliating position

Muted (of colour or lighting) not bright; subdued.

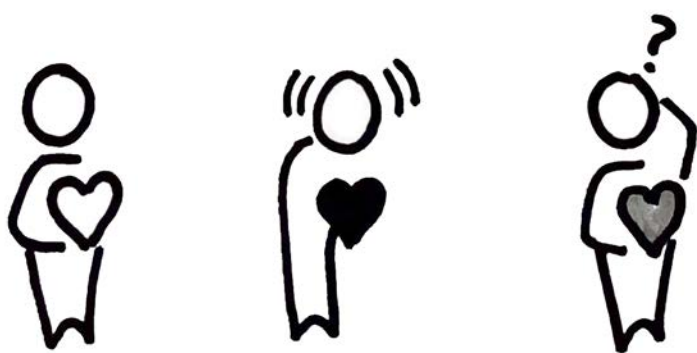
"we like partying & listening to fun music. We used to always go to parties!" Ibrahim & Khadija

"In Syria, I was a popular counsellor - I walked around talking to everybody. Here, I don't have friends"

- Zuhair

"When I express myself in my native language, it captures everything. I can express fluently and honestly. But in english, there are the dangers of being misinterpreted"

- R



In Syria my heart was white; I was pure and wealthy.

- Ahmad

In Jordan my heart was black; fear, anger and sadness, 7 years of disappointment and sadness.

- Ahmad

And in Canada my heart is gray; I left all the feelings in Jordan, I am starting from zero here.

- Ahmad

"I don't want to stay at home and sit all day. From 2013 til now, all I do is sit."

Yafi



"Back home I was working as a nurse, socializing with all these people more my same intellectual level and background... the Filipino friends I meet here, they're not the same for me. And if I do go out of my circle, with other Filipino ladies who are more successful, I feel inferior, they would see me not as an equal. So I don't really socialize anymore."

- Mary

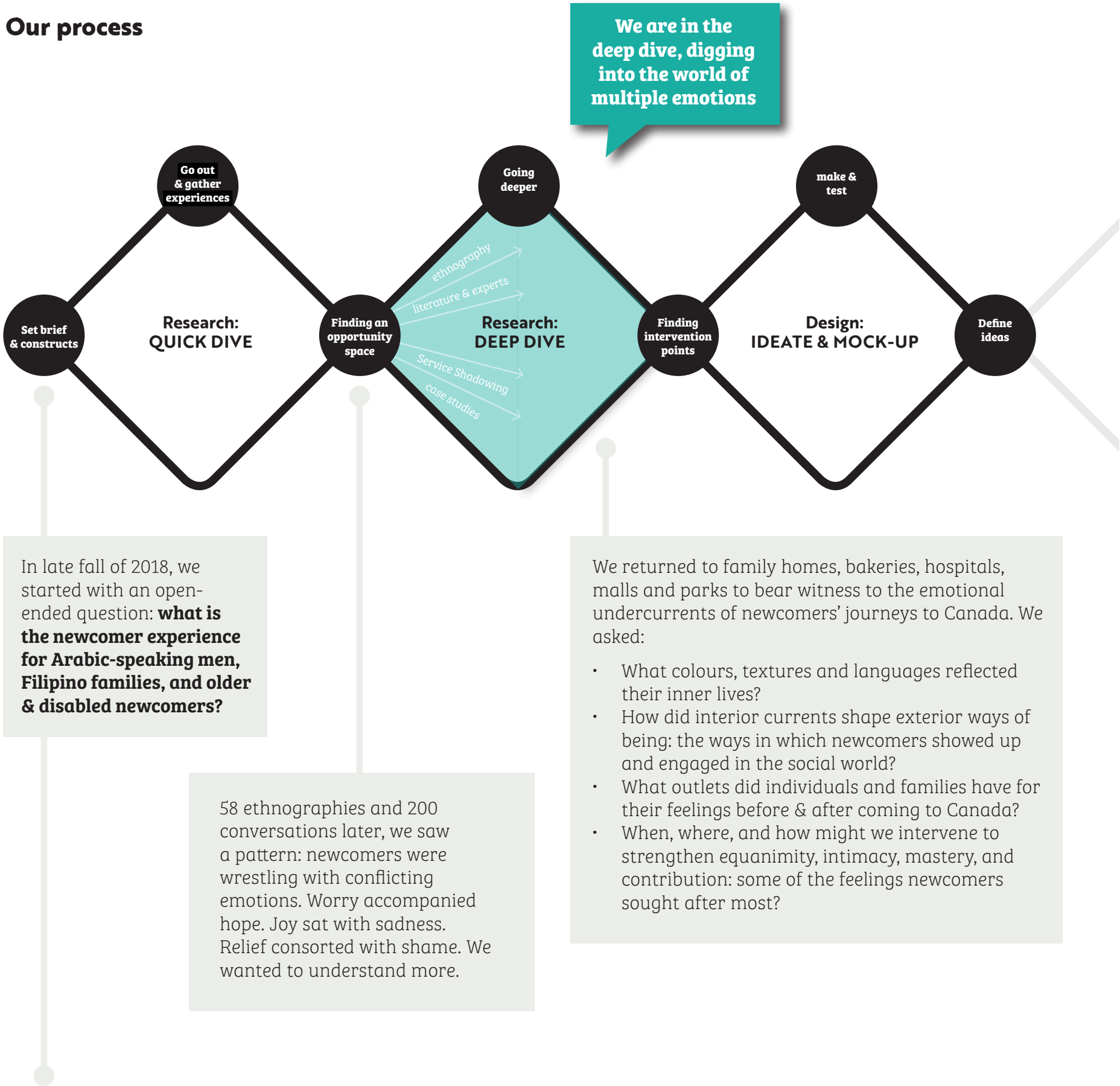
"Connection is very high now but it's not with love"

- Ahmad

Together, we’re re-imagining the newcomer experience.

We’re a partnership between two established non-profits (North York Community House in Toronto, O.N. and Options Community Services in Surrey, B.C.), a social design organization (InWithForward) and a big government agency (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

Our process



Research: QUICK DIVE

On our first round of research: going out & meeting people in context, understanding their realities using visual prompt cards, spending time in family homes, and sharing

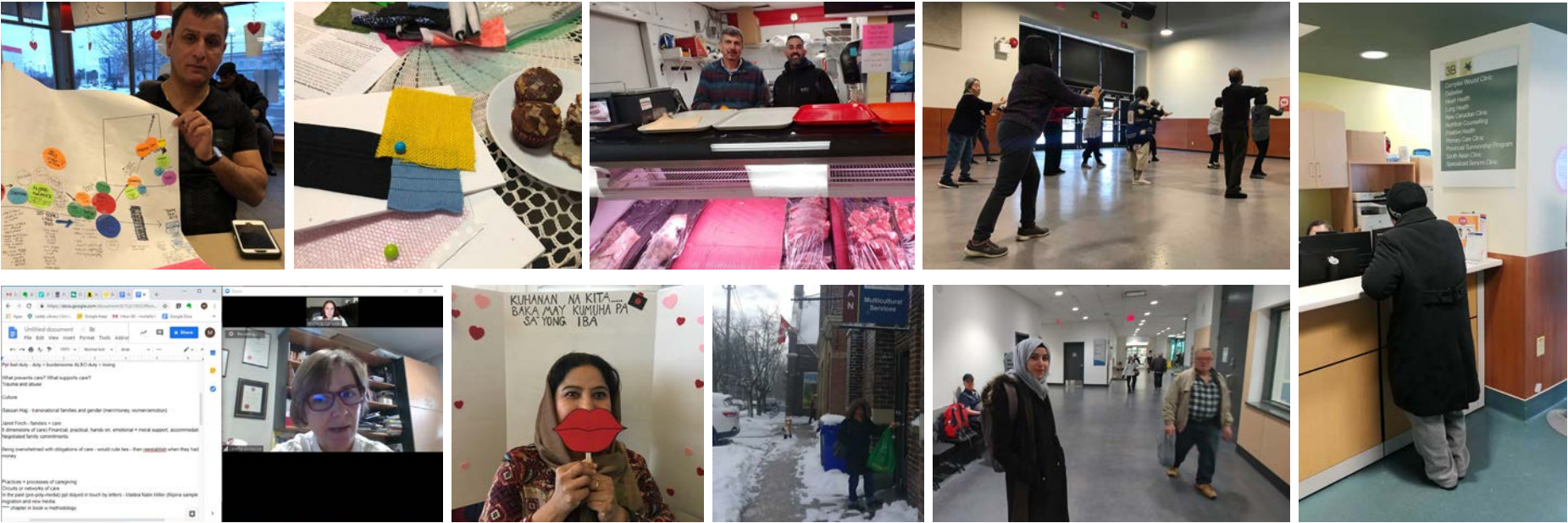


Research: DEEP DIVE

Going deeper into understanding conflicting emotions by making journey maps with newcomers



Shadowing services for newcomers focused on mental health, plus interviewing experts on emotional well-being



Join us in moving from research to action.

How might we use what we learned to prompt change? Our goal isn't to publish a research report. Our aim is to use the research to brainstorm ideas for what could be.

We invite you to read the pages that follow with a generative lens so that by the end you'll be ready to co-create with us, using our board game Elevate.

We are not seeking one magic bullet solution. Emotional ambivalence isn't a singular problem to be solved, but a constellation of experiences to be acknowledged and integrated into everyday life.

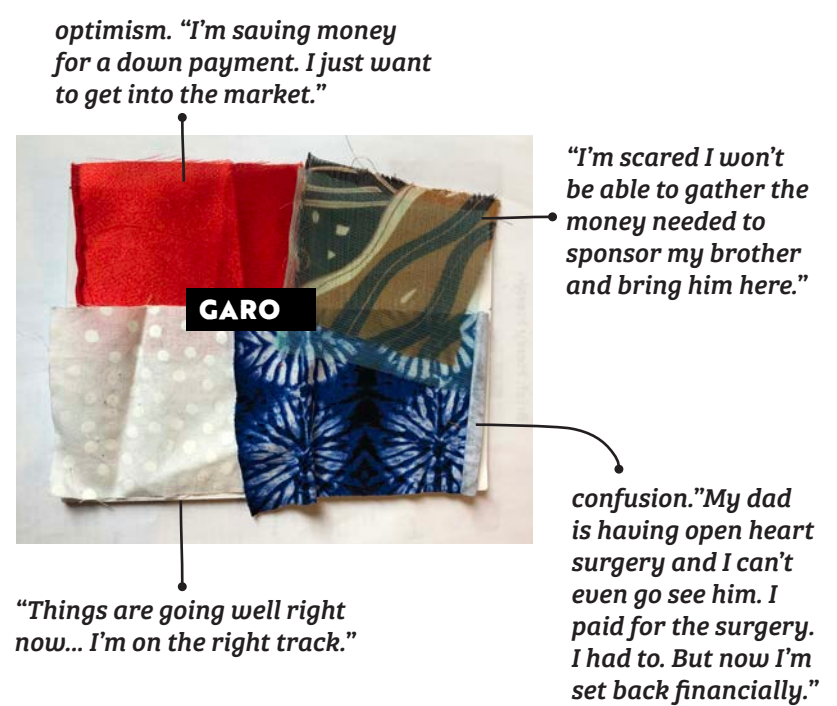


How might we re-design transitions to Canada? What might alternative emotional & social supports look and feel like? In what ways might we amplify people's natural resilience?

Newcomer emotional palettes

Emotions can be hard to express with words - so we encouraged newcomers to use colour and texture to find their own way to convey feeling & sentiment.





What the literature says about emotion

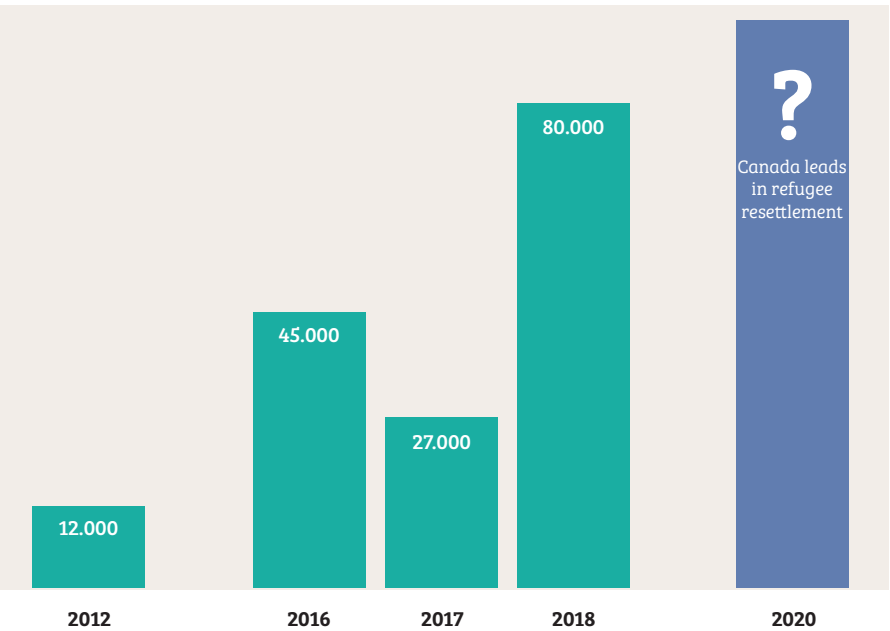
The numbers tell one version of a praise-worthy political story.

In 2012, Canada resettled about 12,000 refugees.* In 2016, in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada welcomed over 45,000 refugees. In 2017, 27,000 Syrian refugees made their way to Canada. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to keep embracing refugees — if so, by 2020, Canada will lead France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States in planned refugee resettlement. That’s alongside a commitment to increase the number of families reunified. In 2018, more than 80,000 family members came to Canada to join their mums, dads, and kids.

But, the numbers don’t reveal much of the evolving personal tales, of what happens when the political hoopla recedes and when the feel-good optics of hope trumping tragedy give way to the realities of striving to live well.

We increasingly recognize that living well isn’t just about our material conditions. It’s not just about safety and security, or law and order, though we desperately require both. Nor is living well just about having a roof over our head, or food on the table, though we very much need those too. Living well, rather, is an interplay between what happens outside of us and what happens inside of us, deep within our emotional core: how we process, respond and make meaning from what’s thrown our way.

Refugees resettled in Canada



To live well, then, we must also feel well. To feel well isn’t to be happy all the time. To feel well is to feel we have the capacities and resources to respond to what comes our way and to navigate our continually changing inner & outer worlds.

What are emotions?

We can think about emotions as episodes that spark five interrelated processes:

(1) information processing

We digest information from our environment, and make some sort of evaluation about events and objects. Maybe we don’t even know we’re doing this: information sorting can be more a background task than a conscious effort.

(2) bodily symptoms

The body reacts — maybe our heart rate rises, our palms sweat, or our pupils dilate, etc.

(3) preparation for action

Our motivation shifts for action - we are readying a response.

(4) motor expression

We communicate a response — our face or voice might change, our body might move: there’s a behavioural shift.

(5) monitoring

We take stock of the experience: this is our subjective sense of what’s going on.

The line of invisibility

We know surprisingly little about how recent refugees to Canada feel and heal: of how they make sense of their contrasting experiences there and here, of how they interpret events, and come to relate to their new and old worlds.

The government’s ‘rapid impact evaluation’ of the 2016 Syrian refugee initiative tells us about the number of services newcomers accessed, their perceived knowledge and skills, and the practical challenges faced. There are only two paragraphs on mental health. They say, “As noted in the 2016 Evaluation of Resettlement Programs, there was a lack of mental health services available for all resettled refugees. Interviewees, stakeholders from visit sites and literature all identified mental health issues as a potential challenge for the Syrian refugee population, which may become more pressing over time as they continue to establish themselves in Canada.”

The academic literature gives us a few more glimpses of the emotional realities refugees and immigrants face. But, the data is inconsistent. Newcomers’ health shifts over time. Age, gender, and number of years in Canada affect how people come to see their feelings and seek help.

- First-generation immigrant youth in Canada experience higher psychological distress compared to second or third generation immigrant youth (Hamilton, Noh, & Adlaf, 2009).
- Immigrant and refugee youth in Canada are more likely to visit the emergency room for mental health issues than Canadian born young people (Sanders, Gill, et al., 2018)
- Immigrant men in Canada under-utilize psychological services (Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005).
- Long-term immigrants (immigrants in Canada 10+ years) report significantly higher prevalence of poor mental health than recent immigrants. In some studies, there is a “healthy immigrant effect” with newer immigrants reporting less mental health challenges (Lou and Beaujot, 2005).

* Via the UNHCR. These numbers don’t include the number of asylum seekers who cross the border first then apply for refugee status.

Emotional health & mental health care: there’s a difference

We often talk about mental health and emotional health as if they are the same thing. Perhaps that’s because the dominant response to emotional or psychological distress is mental health care, and there, the research is clear: there is a sizable utilization gap. Too many mental health care services are not accessed by or accessible to newcomers. Naturally, a lot of the policy discourse concentrates on closing the gap: on addressing language barriers, better training professionals, and increasing culturally-competent and trauma-informed care.

What’s talked about less is the design gap: how the emotional experiences of many newcomers may be a poor fit for mental health care services. That’s because there’s a couple of assumptions underpinning westernized mental health care:

Diagnosis: getting help is predicated on an assessment of need and severity. Clinicians use a set of criteria, called the DSM-5, to diagnose “dysfunctions in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning.” Gaining a diagnosis helps to unlock specialist treatment, referrals, and system resources.

Individualism: assessment happens at an individual level. The DSM-5 talks about “clinically significant disturbances” in the *individual’s* cognition, emotional regulation or behaviour. The idea that an emotional challenge might live at a relational level — between people — rather than inside one person is not built into the diagnostic or treatment process.

Alternative conceptualizations of mental health abound. For example, Persian conceptions of mental health — drawing on the words *sal* and *salamat* — focus on wholeness, versus brokenness, on being sound in mind, body and spirit. Indigenous notions of mental health, rooted in the medicine wheel, bring together mind, body, spirit and emotion. Respect, wisdom, responsibility and relationship to nation, family, community and land are part and parcel to balanced and healthful living.

Even the DSM-5 recognizes that many of our emotional experiences, however painful, are not disorders. The guidelines note, “An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a disorder.”

Since so much of the newcomer experience is about how families respond to an accumulation of losses and stressors in new geographies and unfamiliar cultures, **how might we enhance family resiliency and sustain emotional health? How might we move towards an appreciation of emotional health — not as the presence or absence of mental illness — but as a set of social-emotional competencies and resources for finding peace, meaning and belonging through life’s ups and downs?**

What’s talked about less is the design gap: how the emotional experiences of many newcomers may be a poor fit for mental health care services.

Emotional health vocabularies

in Arabic

- If life gives you a chance take it (Eza Aatatka Al Haya Fursa Eghtanamha)
- Think about happiness, you will be happy (Fakr Bel Farah tafrah)
- Lighting a small candle is better than cursing the dark (An tazee Shamaa saghera kher mn an talaan al zalam). This means instead of complaining, just do something about it.
- Whoever suffers a lot, learns a lot (man yata alam ak thar sayaraf ak thar)
- Psychologically tired (Nafseya taabana)
- Tough time (Fatra saaba)
- My soul got out (Rohe telaat): this is when you are suffer from something for long period of time.

in Kurdish

- Eating worry (khafat akhom)
- My heart is about to explode (Dlm khareka ataqet): this one is used when someone is in a problem and can not do anything about it or when they are waiting for a news, or when they received a very bad news.
- Boiling from inside (Nakhm akwlet) : this one is used when someone is feeling really sad or helpless about something

in Tagalog

- “My heart is being crushed”
- “Intensely longing for someone” (Pangungulila)
- “Feeling weak” (from missing people)
- “First world problems”
- “Lightning” (Linte)
- “Enough” (Basta)
- “I could devour you” when you’re angry (Nakaka gigil ka)
- “I want to tear out your hair” (Sarap mong sabunutan)

Building emotional competencies and resources

Another way to think about emotional health is a collection of assets — of skills, beliefs, and relationships — associated with positive life outcomes (Haisman-Smith, 2017). While we can cash in these assets during tough times, we can amass a reservoir of assets in everyday times. These assets are inherently contextual: they reflect family practices, cultural traditions, religious teachings, and community bonds.

How might we invest in newcomer’s emotional assets?

Resiliency beliefs

These are the deeply-rooted ideas people hold about who they are and what they deserve. This include beliefs like ...

- **Worthiness and adequacy:** whether people feel they matter, and the basis for their esteem
- **Self-compassion:** whether people can view themselves (and their families) with loving-kindness
- **Agency & control:** whether people see themselves (and their families/ communities) as drivers of their lives
- **Learning & growth:** whether people allow themselves to learn from mis-steps, and try, try again

Coping skills & routines

These include competencies to regulate emotions and outlets for working through feelings. They include things like ...

- **Emotional reappraisal & acceptance:** the capacity to re-frame moments and/or not react
- **Acculturation strategies:** techniques for navigating cultural expectations
- **Every day practices:** be that mindfulness, breathing exercises, faith-based routines, exercise, food, etc.

Relational resources

These are the opportunities people have around them to connect, to authentically communicate, and to share. This includes things like ...

- **Intimate and trusting relationships:** with friends, family, and supporters
- **Sense of belonging** and affiliation to others (versus otherness, judgement, discrimination, stigma)
- **Social capital:** the bonds of hospitality and trust between people in a neighbourhood and across community

"An awareness of strategies to handle stress reactions has not often translated into practice. The phrase 'mental health' itself continues to conjure up for many providers images of depressed or ill people, and these misperceptions end up contributing to poor service. Since there is rarely training for prevention ...it has been easy to relegate 'emotional' challenges to crisis interventions."

- Janice Abarbanel



Learnings

Mixed emotions are the norm	14
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Lived experience:

Mixed emotions are the norm

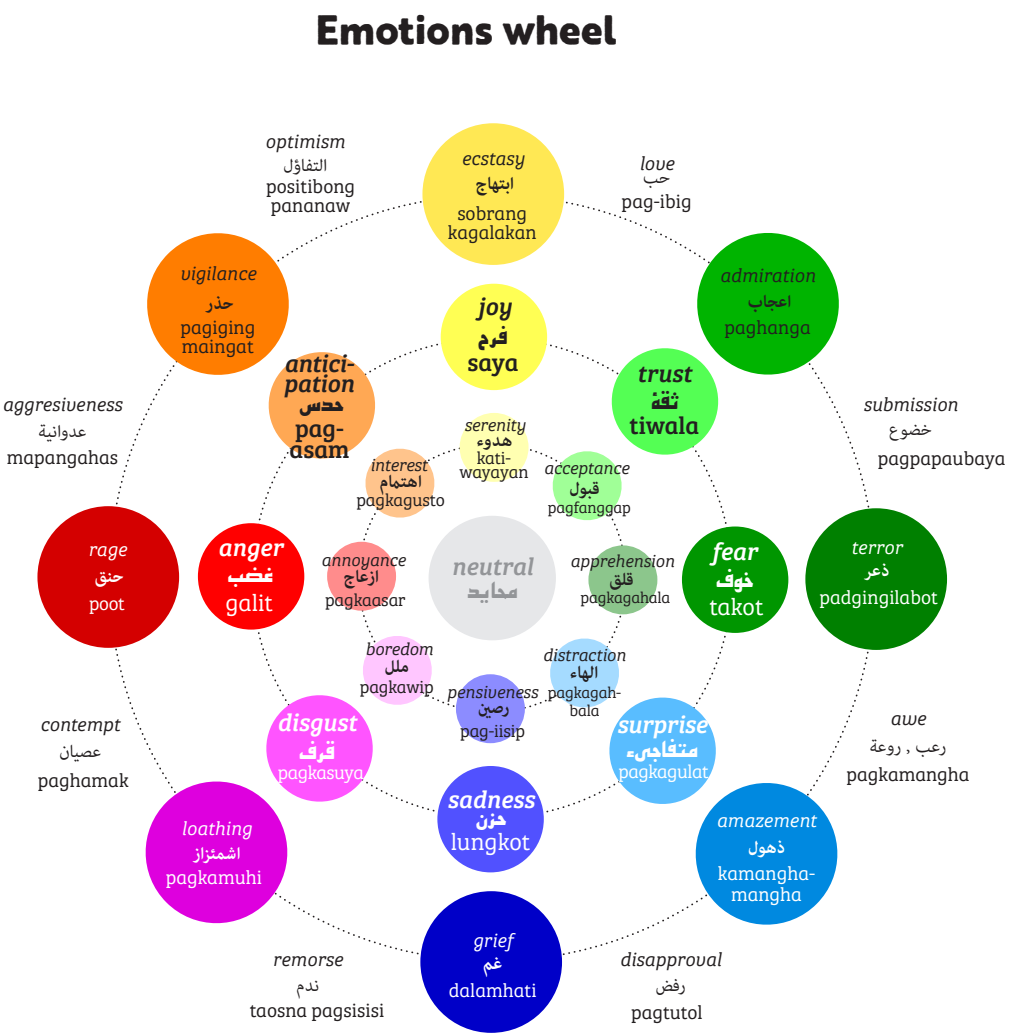
Prevailing narratives point to a happily-ever-after newcomer story once they land in Canada. Unsurprisingly, we’ve yet to meet a newcomer whose journey to Canada could be encapsulated by one, singular emotion. Anticipation and hope, gratitude and pride, sadness and loneliness, anger and frustration, worry and angst, disgust and humiliation come, sometimes go, and sometimes stay, along the way.

The newcomer experience is one of emotions constantly on the move, as the researchers Paulo Boccagni and Loretta Baldassar write:

“Far from being the opposite of the instrumental (economically-driven) dimension of migrant life, the emotional dimension is its inescapable complement, in which ambivalence is more common than straightforward either (home) /or (host oriented) emotional states.”

Thre is often little room for mixed feelings. Most of the newcomers we met were initially hesitant to report anything but happiness and satisfaction, lest they be seen as unappreciative or rude to their new country. And yet, satisfaction with Canada is a commonly asked question in surveys and evaluations.

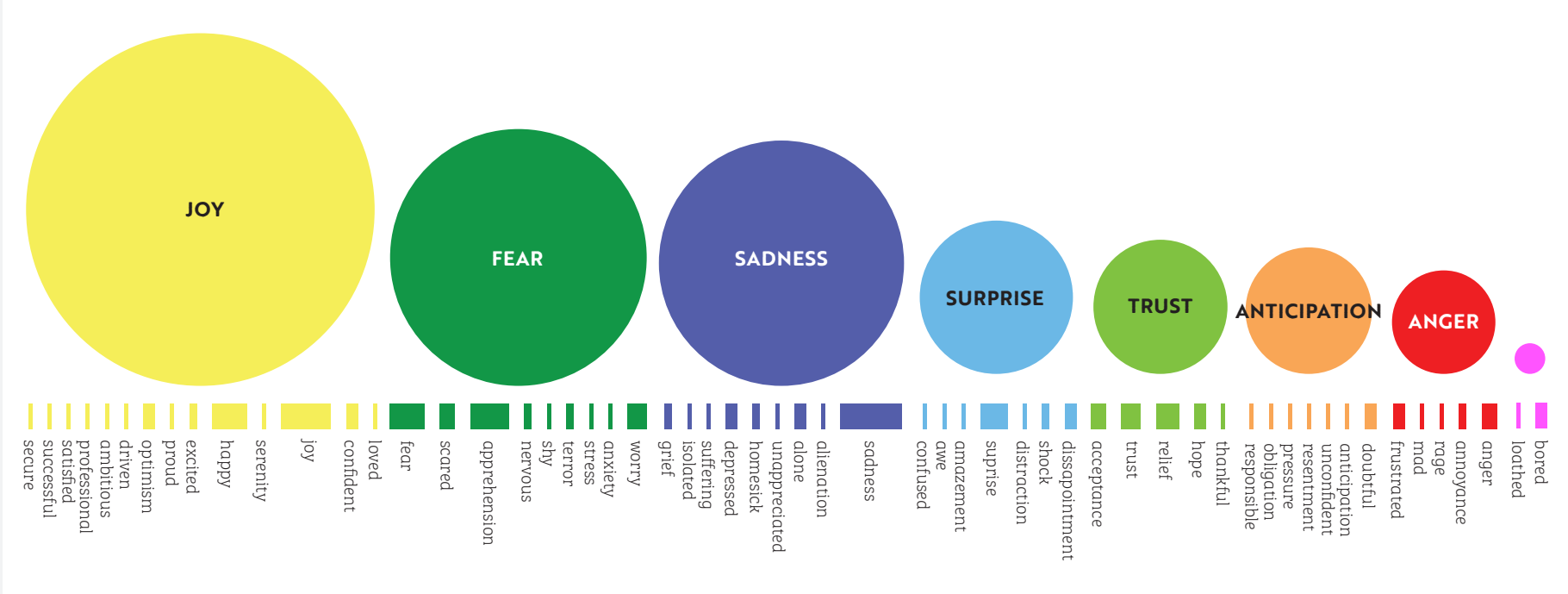
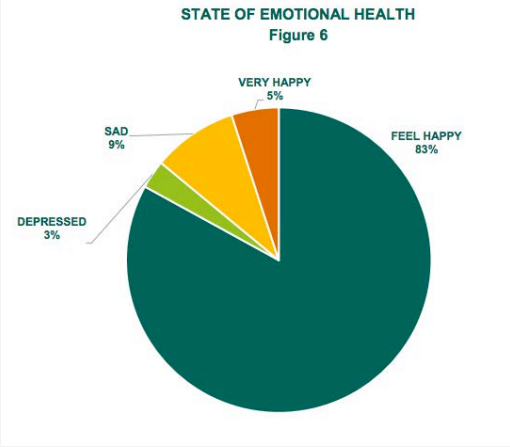
Research conducted by COSTI Immigrant Services Toronto found that the vast majority of immigrants were happy. We wanted to go deeper than a survey can. So, we worked to normalize opposing feelings. We offered a range of ways to express emotions — using a colour wheel to unbundle feelings of joy, surprise, sadness, disappointment, anger and fear. Differentiating our emotions — and going granular to voice the shape and size of an emotion — seems to serves people well. Recent research suggests that individuals at times of distress, who experience their emotions with granularity, find healthier coping outlets and strengthen their capacity to bounce back and forward (Kashdan, Barrett and McKnight, 2015).



Emotional experiences in Canada

We aggregated the emotions newcomers pinpointed since coming to Canada, making a map of their highs and lows to surface the range of feelings.

diagram from COSTI’s research showing the state of emotional health for immigrants

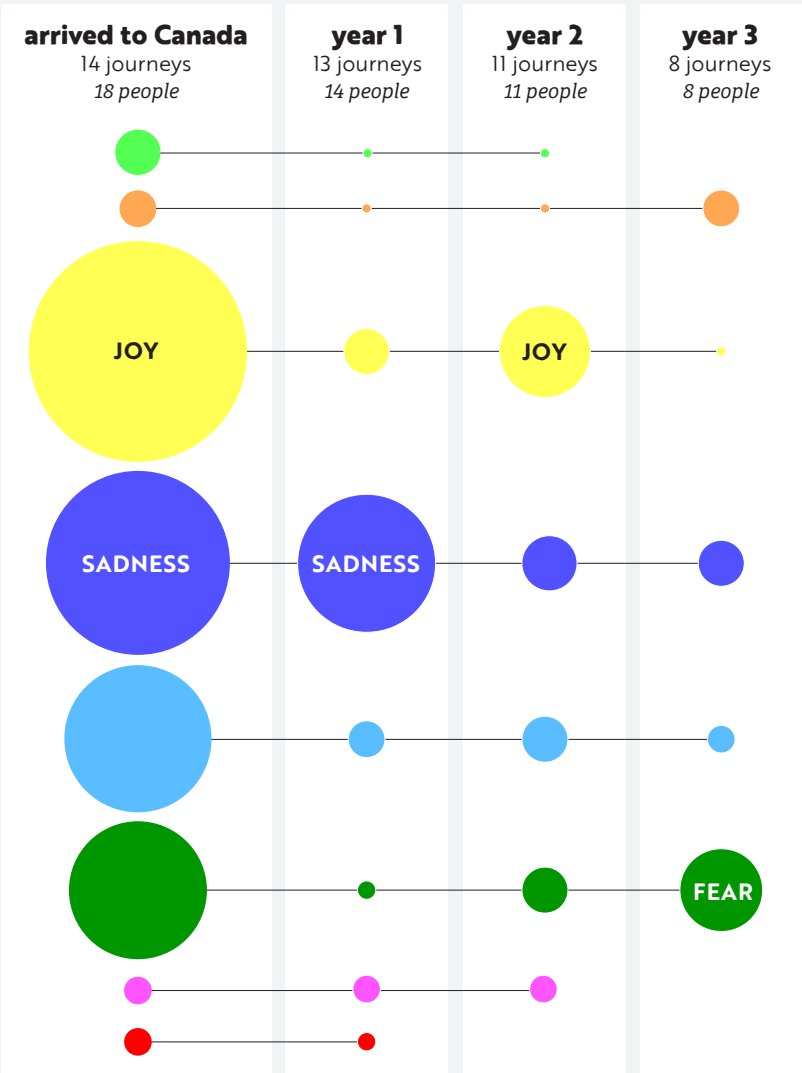


Lived experience:

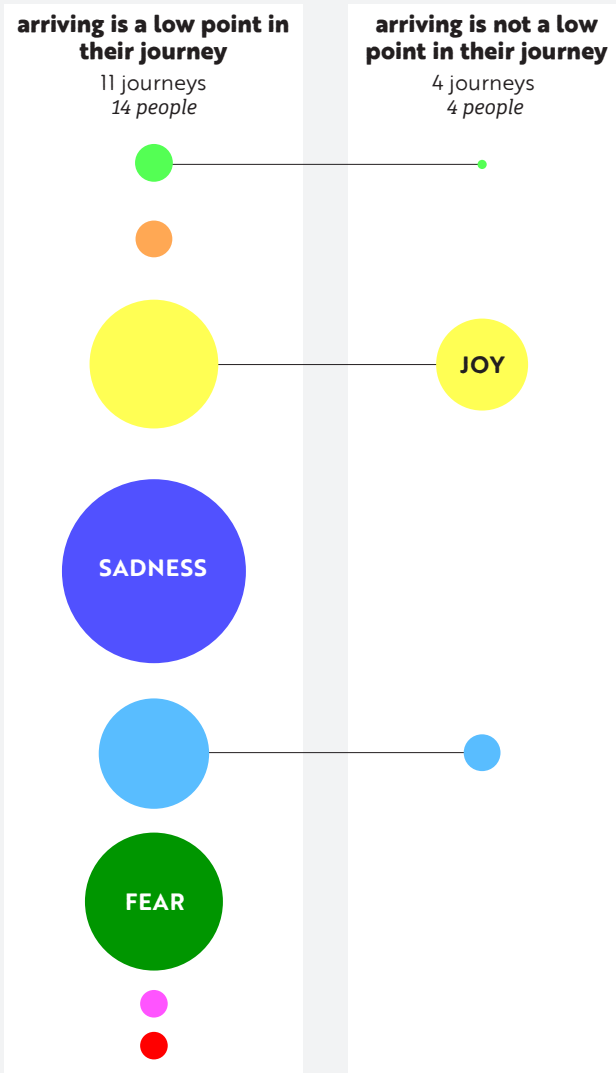
Emotions fluctuate over time

Emotions are far from constant. From spending time with newcomers at different points in their journey — from the first three months to one, two, three, four, even five years later — we see how the confluence of new life events plus the growing distance from home and place-based relationships shifts people’s identities and affiliations, and their sense of feeling rooted versus unmoored.

Emotions in the first three years



Differential experiences in Canada



First year doldrums

Sadness is one of the more dominant emotions newcomers talk about in year one. Filipino fathers, reuniting with their wives in Canada, describe deeply missing their life back home: they long for a clear role, purpose, and their once robust network of friends and family. This is also true for nearly all of the Filipino and Arabic-speaking teenagers we met, who, in their first months, find they cannot escape feelings of loneliness and regret. So they opt to lead double lives using online games as a setting to reunite with friends left behind.



With so much time invested in maintaining old relationships, there may be little energy to seek out new relationships. And, in the early and fledgling stages, a new friendship can feel superficial and **unfulfilling**. Newcomers described relationships forged out of convenience, rather than shared interests, and at times, lamented their undifferentiated status. A common refrain

from Arabic-speaking refugees was they were not like the “other” Arabic-speaking refugees — with some feeling **resentful** that they were perceived by services and society as all the same. Indeed, the refugees with the highest intensity of sadness and frustration, expressed they had exceedingly low trust with Arabic-speaking service providers. Most of the services offered to them were delivered by Arabic-speaking workers. Much of the resettlement programming on offer brings together people from similar cultural and language groups.

Second year awakening

Joy, confidence, optimism, acceptance and **apprehension** featured in year two of newcomers’ journey maps, the year with the most even, and least intense, spread of emotions. Families describe the shock wearing off: children better adjusting to school, English improving, more employment prospects.

Indeed, the smatterings of dismay and disgust present in year one wears off, as people gain more of a sense of control over their situations. And yet, year two is also when **boredom** first shows up. Life can still feel like a waiting game: there’s progress, but it’s not enough. The gap between where people are, and where they want to be, is frustratingly real. Health challenges are often continuing to slow people (especially older & disabled refugees) down. The waiting time can feel

like dead time. In their home countries, they knew where to turn to close gaps: the people to talk to, the networks to tap into, the places to congregate. Here, it can feel down to happenstance. They may not have the right connections.

Third year fears

Three years after arriving to Canada, newcomers gain their first shot at citizenship. With a successful language and citizenship test, they can move from permanent residents to citizens. It’s yet another transition, in a tiring string of transitions, throwing up more **uncertainty**: what will life be like going forward? Will anything substantively change? Often, the financial realities have fully set-in: day-to-day life is expensive, and without some of the benefits and subsidized services, costs could rise.

Refugees talk about the stakes now being higher: what if they aren’t good enough for the job, or for their new studies? What if the fail? Filipino newcomers particularly highlighted the material pressures they faced: the desire and, often expectation, to contribute income. Indeed, the duality of **anxiety** and aspiration centres on materiality: having a home, a car, and all the right stuff: the nike shoes, the iPhone X. For Arabic-speaking refugees, the materiality seems in pursuit of relationships: having the means to travel, to see family, to sponsor family, to have a home big enough for one’s family, etc.

Surprise

sur·prise
/sə(r)'prīz/
noun
an unexpected or astonishing event, fact, or thing.

Other emotions that sit with surprise

SURPRISE

dissapointment

shock

distraction

suprise

amazement

awe

confused

What suprise looks like:



“I have so many disappointments, I need to think of colors that represent disappointments for me.”
Mande

How people describe suprise:

“I thought my girls would be free here. They deserve to be free and go wherever they want. But they brought us from one hell to a different kind of hell.”
Adham

“The future is vague, I don’t know about the future. I thought I’d get another chance here but I didn’t get that chance.”
Mande

“UNHCR called us to go to their office and when we went, we did some paperwork and they told us that after 20 days you will go to Canada. In the 20 days we were flying of happiness, then we came to the welcome house we were on the zero. We fall from sky to earth.”
Nasir

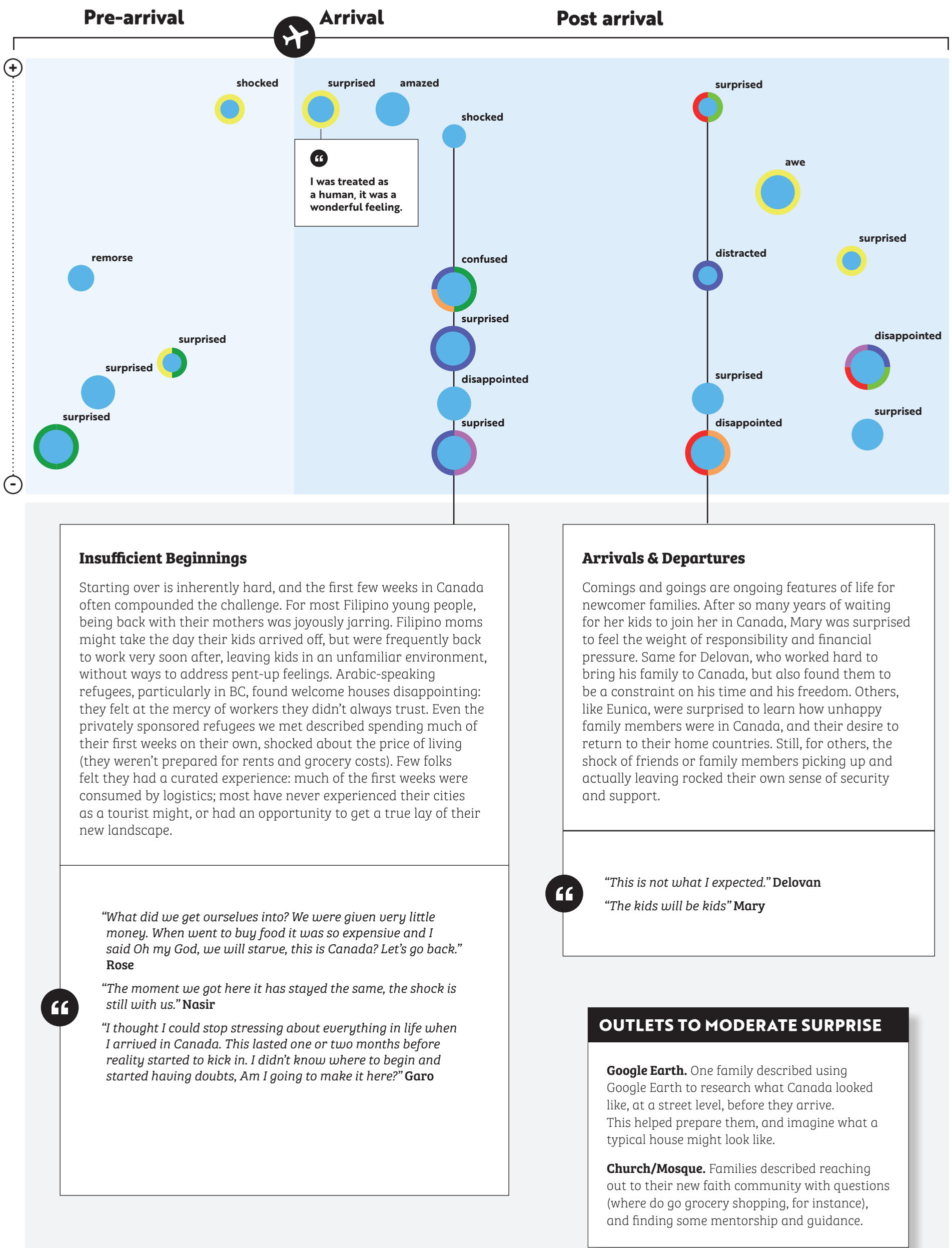
“We felt so disgusted at the welcome center, before we came we thought Canada would be imaginary, and it is, the outside is beautiful but we went through a lot. Here is really difficult.”
Nasir

“They were giving us very little money and when we were going to buy food it was so expensive and I said Oh my God ,we will starve, is this Canada? Let’s go back.”
Nasir

“We thought Canada was like a dream land but it turned out to be like a regular country.”
Fadia

Suprise throughout the journey

Below are the themes that emerged when looking at how surprise showed up in people’s journeys to and now living in Canada.



Sadness

/sad/

adjective

feeling or showing sorrow; unhappy.

Other emotions that sit with sadness

SADNESS

sadness

alienation

alone

unappreciated

homesick

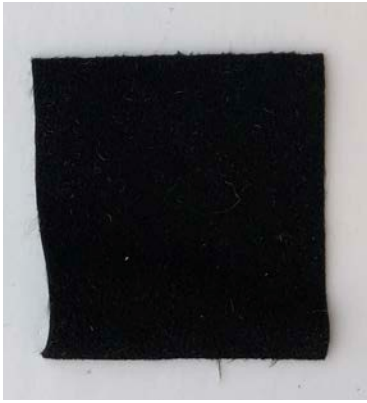
depressed

suffering

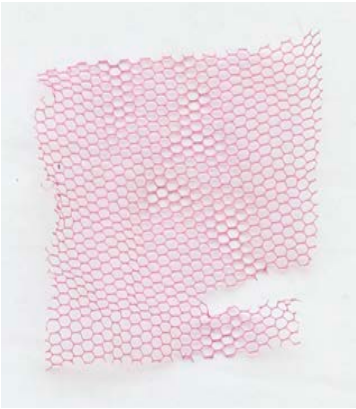
isolated

grief

What sadness looks like:



“Being away from brothers and sisters and relatives. I am so far away that I can’t be close to anyone.”
Rose



“I take a lot of pills, I am not that well.”
Eman’s mom



“My depression, sadness, what am I feeling when my father got sick. When I’m alone at home this is what I feel like: great sadness.”
Kat



“I am sick and tired, I am always sad. I don’t know why, maybe because we are seniors and we are old.”
Nasir



Represents confusion.”My dad is having open heart surgery and I can’t even go see him. I paid for the surgery. I had to. But now I’m set back financially.”
Garro

How people describe sadness:

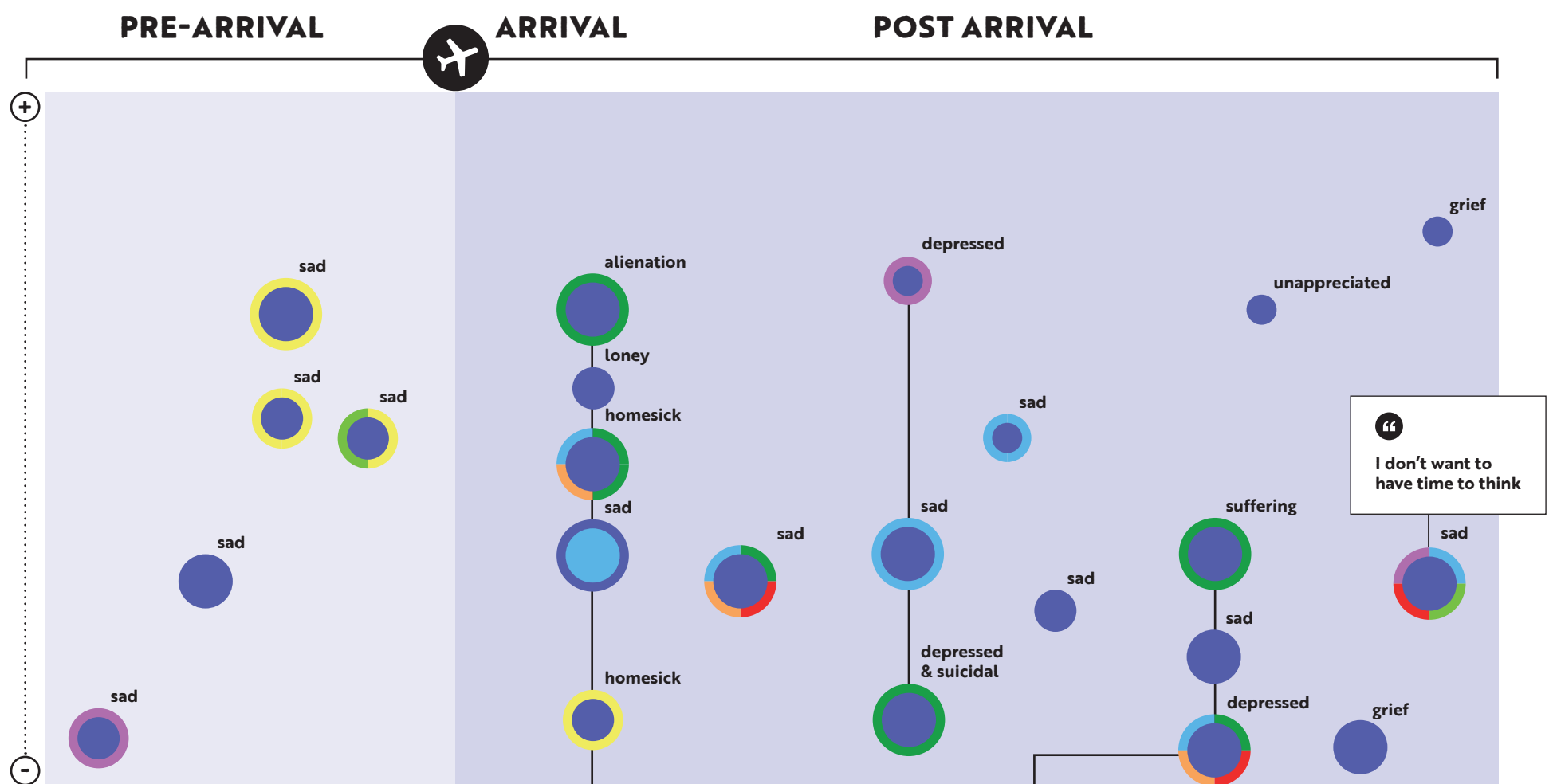
“Here is a prison but a big one, we are so uncomfortable because we do not know the language, and for our occasions(Eid holidays) we do not feel it, we do not feel the sense of Ramadan and the celebration of it. For the security side, it is true that here is safe but for other things we do not feel life.”
Rose

“ I think too much about work and it makes me sad when they do not accept me due to my age and also things are so expensive, if things get more and more expensive, rent gets expensive and the assistance are the same then we will be sadder and uncomfortable.”
Nasir

“ I became really sad, it was not nice what happened to me. I am sad because when the assistance told me that I am homeless.”
Fer

Sadness throughout the journey

Below are the three themes that emerged when looking at how sadness presented in newcomer journeys.



Losing touch (physical & emotional)

Coming to Canada means leaving people and places behind, and losing physical connectivity with some of the things that once mattered most. While instant messaging platforms like Whatsapp allow family members to stay in contact, they don't (yet) enable physical touch. Emotional closeness can also feel elusive. Newcomers described sharing sanitized versions of their transition stories, lest they be perceived as ungrateful or unhappy. Abeer, from Syria, stayed in her room, crying, for her first weeks in Canada. Kat, from the Philippines, did the same. Fer described her "heart just about exploding" because of the sadness. Tamer struggled to share what he was going through, or relate to friends and family left behind. The two worlds were so vastly different that even a phone call or video chat couldn't mediate the separation. Some newcomers pine for the old world: their sadness is couched in terms of homesickness. Other newcomers feel squarely in the new world: their sadness is rooted in disconnection.

*"No matter how much your friends love you
it's not the same than having your family"*
Fadia

"I was sad for one full year. Homesick and missed the kids."

Unresolved grief & loss

Haci's sister and her children died in Syria when a missile struck their house. Eman's sister is still in Syria; contact is sporadic. Delovan's mother died before he could bring her to Canada. "This destroyed my life," he says. So much tragedy has befallen newcomers. They have survived, while some of their loved ones did not. It's makes little sense. It's grossly unfair. Grappling with sadness, denial, anger, depression and bargaining alongside setting-up a new life in Canada is a big ask. Most newcomers had no time or space to properly mourn, to observe cultural or religious traditions, and to honor the memories of those they've lost. While there is growing recognition of the accumulated traumas many newcomers carry, and a focus on trauma-informed services, services aren't the typical response to grief and loss in newcomers' home cultures: it's more about faith and community.

Letdowns

It's all too easy to romanticize and idealize Canada from afar. Once up close and personal, it's all too easy for Canada to disappoint. Newcomers know so very little before boarding a plane to Canada — even Filipino young people whose moms have lived in Canada for many years, have no sense of what the school system and social scene will feel like. While most Arabic-speaking refugees attended an orientation about Canada before boarding the plane here, what they most remember hearing about was the weather, the system of government, and the pragmatics of their first few days. There was little by way of expectation management. There was little storytelling of the experiential or emotional sides, making the difficulties that have emerged particularly unexpected. And where do you go once you feel the tinge of disappointment?

OUTLETS TO MODERATE SADNESS

Google Earth. One family described using Google Earth to research what Canada looked like, at a street level, before they arrive. This helped prepare them, and imagine what a typical house might look like.

Online games. Multiplayer role play games like pubg, Rainbow 6 Siege and Fortnite serve as both an immersive distraction, and a platform for connecting with old and new friends, across geographic bounds.

Pills. Sleeping pills and anti-depressants are often new additions to newcomers' repertoires in Canada. They are easily prescribed.

YouTube. Watching videos of singers, weddings, and celebrations can offer momentary relief to newcomers, who are homesick for some of the sights and sounds of their home country. Some newcomers are spending much of their day on YouTube, both feeling nostalgic and connected.

Community dinner. Once a month, Fadia heads to a community potluck dinner. It always lifts her mood. “I meet friends I rarely see. You feel different afterward, laughing and joking.”

Teacher. For school-aged refugees, a kind and supportive teacher can help attenuate sadness. At least that worked for Katrina who confided in a teacher, and felt real relief at getting the sadness off her chest.

Fear

fear

/'fir/

noun

an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat.

Other emotions that sit with fear



- worry
- anxiety
- stress
- terror
- shy
- nervous
- apprehension
- scared
- fear

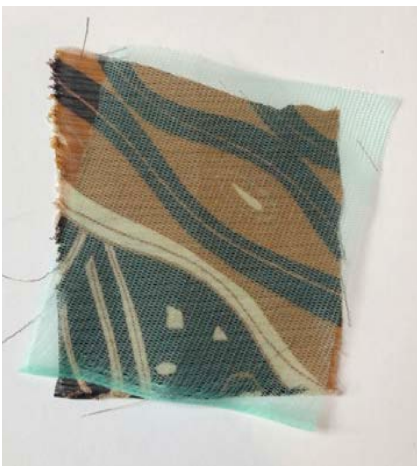
What fear looks like:



*This represents worry.
“My parents are quite open about their financial troubles, I really want to start work so I can contribute.”
Eunica*



*This represents fear of not recovering her cognitive clarity. “I was hit by a car and life has become foggy.”
Mary*



*“I’m scared I won’t be able to gather the money needed to sponsor my brother and bring him here.”
Garó*

How people describe fear:

“When they told me we were coming to Canada I was just crying, and crying because this was a strange country for me and I knew nobody, I was afraid of the life there. I was in depression, I was not going out of the house. I was just waiting for the day to finish and that’s it...The first couple of months in Canada I was feeling the same and life was difficult.”
Abeer

“These lines represent people and they are all bad. I met one Canadian family who invited me to their house, they’re a very nice family but the problem is we couldn’t communicate, and their life is so different from ours. I was afraid I would say or do the wrong thing.”
Mande

“For one complete year life was so difficult, we were so desperate and so sad because we didn’t know anything about our sister...I was feeling apprehension and fear of what would happen to her. My appetite opened, I was eating a lot.”
Abeer

“After lots of disappointments, I feel people are very bad. Maybe, maybe later in life will be a little bit green, I’m trying to have hope for myself but I’m not sure.”
Mande

Below are the three themes that emerged when looking at the role of fear in the journeys of newcomers.



"When I found out my husband wasn't coming, I thought, what's the point of going, then?"

OUTLETS TO MODERATE FEAR

Shisha Lounge. Having a chill place to go, during the day or late at night, offers real comfort to Tamer, who goes to play cards, dominos, and chat with the 22 or so regulars. If he's not sure how to do something, or get something done, he can seek out advice.

Housing, groceries, and transportation are big expenses that are bigger than expected for many newcomers. While going to food banks can help defray grocery costs, relying on food from others feels demeaning. A number of families used to grow their own food, and are used to being self-sufficient (in act, they would like to get back into agriculture). Housing and transportation generally feel out of reach. Cheaper rents are farther out of town — away from cultural grocery stores or places of worship — and that increases car or transit costs. Mande talks about not feeling able to afford the bus to go to services. Figuring out how to make ends meet, particularly when government subsidies or private sponsorships end, clouds many newcomers' thinking. For some, the pervasiveness of the worry makes it hard to see other opportunities.

Boredom

boredom

/bôrd/

adjective

feeling weary because one is unoccupied or lacks interest in one’s current activity.

Boredom as part of disapproval

bored

loathed

In Canada, we don’t often think of newcomers as feeling bored. Their stories are full of job searches, immigration lawyers appointments, multiple jobs, ESL classes, and spending time with family and kids. Filipino moms don’t sleep much. “My first job is 5am-1pm. I then take the bus to my second job 2pm-8pm. My last one is 9pm-2am and then I go home and clean the house” (Filipino female).

But many newcomers aren’t experiencing boredom in the terms we are most familiar with - a lack of stimulation, novelty, activity or sociality. Rather, there is another type of boredom, often overlooked, yet acutely experienced by newcomers - existential boredom. According to scholar Peter Toohey existential boredom is “neither an emotion, nor a mood, nor a feeling”, instead, it’s experienced as a state akin to depression.



Black represents melancholy. “I’m bored. And the weather right now isn’t great”
Welson



”This one has tiny wholes, it’s like a corridor you can’t get out of” Fadia

How people describe boredom:

“Everyday I’m just waiting to start college, graduate college and then work. I want to make money.”
Marwan

“To pass time while on dialysis I pray in my hands or read the Quran.”
Ahmad

“I signed up to work in my mother’s factory. Arranging the DVDs that are being recorded there. I really wanted to work to contribute financially to my parents. I didn’t want to waste another summer sitting at home doing nothing.”
Eunica

“The people I meet, they don’t stimulate me, so I don’t go out much anymore.” Mary

When a Filipino after school games program was cancelled, Filipino students responded: “big brother why are you cancelling, you know that’s the only thing we are anticipating the whole week, to play. It’s boring at home because there is nobody there.”
Filipino students at Downsview Secondary School.

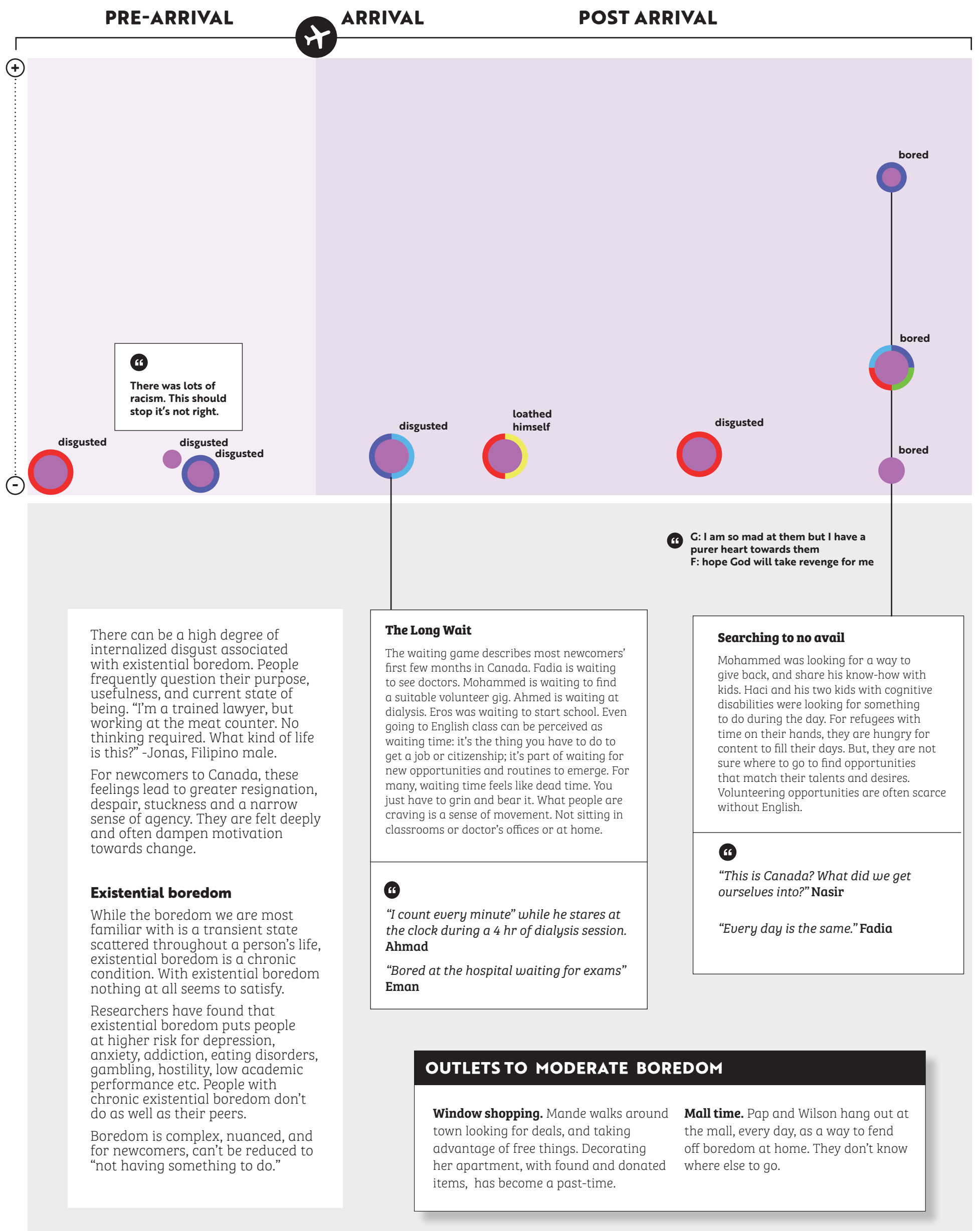
“There’s no opportunity for me to work here, not when they see my white hair. So I just come to the mall everyday. This is my life now. What a life!”
Welson

“Back in the Philippines the street is a social venue, but that’s not the case in in Canada because it’s cold.”
R

Waiting for kidney transplant “I can’t carry heavy things, sitting is better until I get my new kidney.... I want to learn something else. Learn new things like sawing to become a tailor so I am not wasting my time.” Ahmad

Boredom throughout the journey

Below are two themes that emerged when looking at how boredom played into people's journeys.

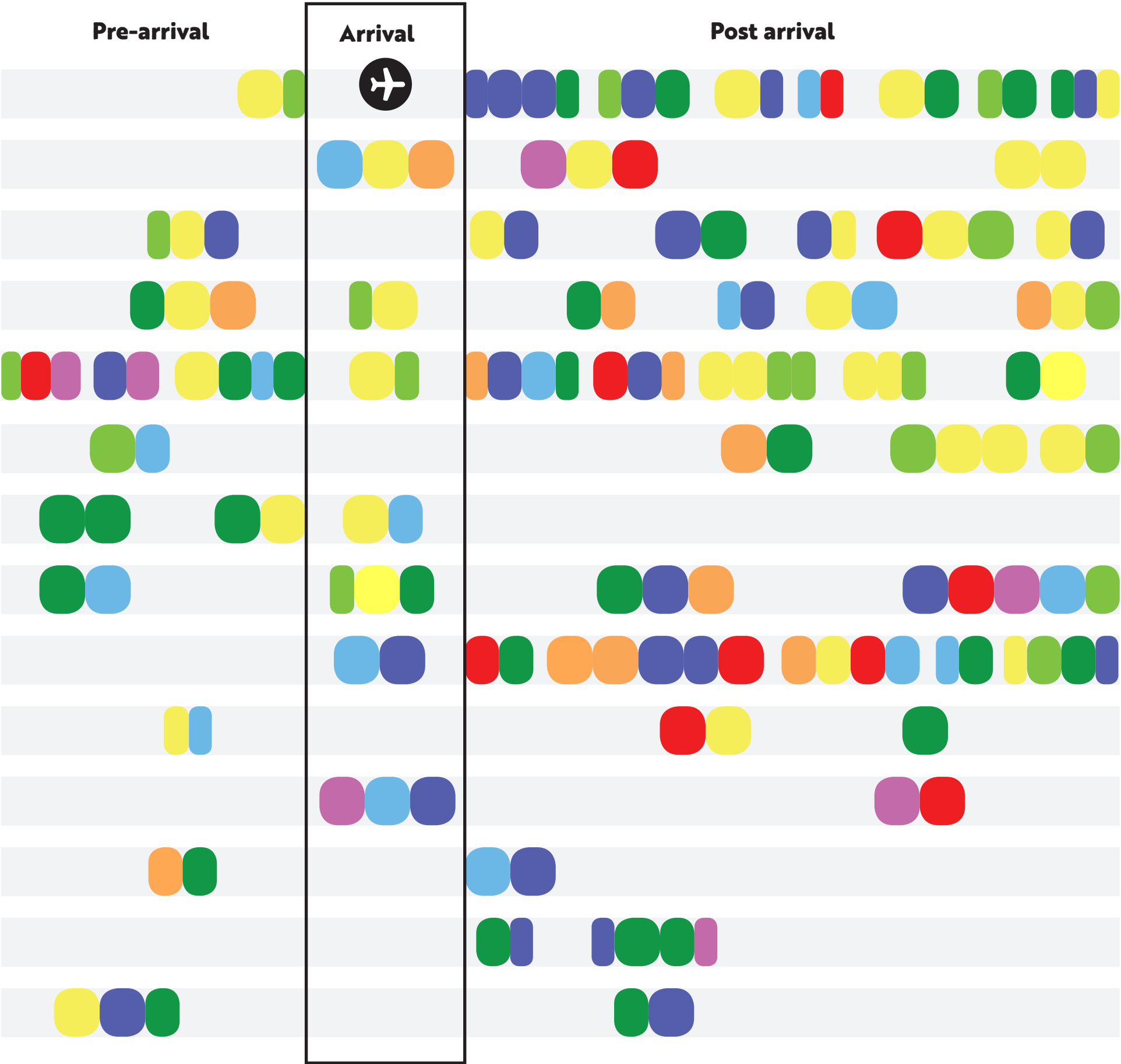


Lived experience:

Emotional blends

Newcomers’ emotional landscapes, far from single-colour compositions, come in shades and temperatures. Certain emotional building blocks blended more with one another: sadness with fear; joy with resignation; surprise with sadness.

The range of emotional blends across newcomer journeys:

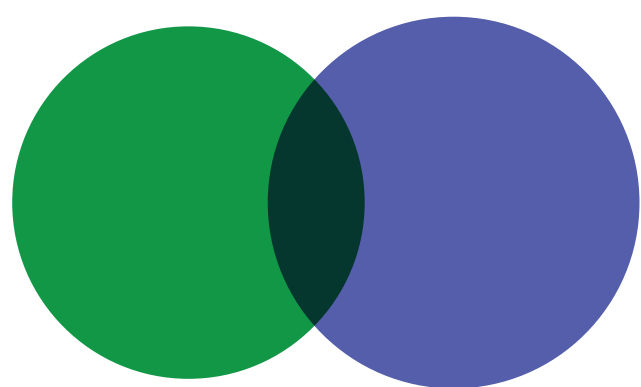


HOW MIGHT WE ...

If emotions come in pairs or triplicate, what would it look like to recognize and address them together?

What might be the antidote to fear coupled with sadness? How might we prevent pessimism from twinning with resignation, and instead, leverage the optimism from joy?

Common emotions that showed up together



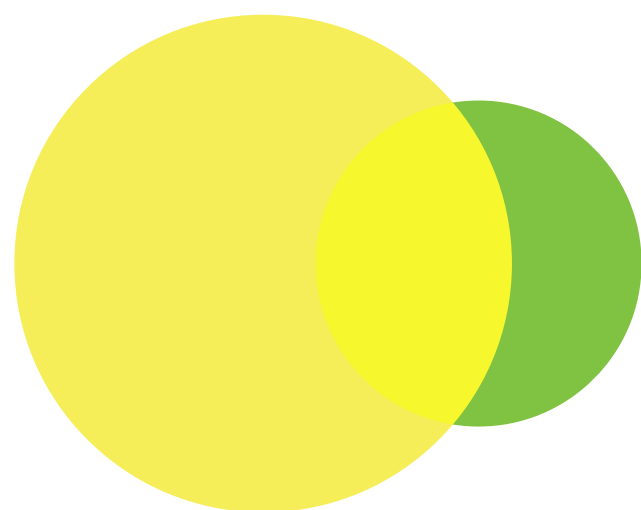
Fear, worry, confusion, afraid, alone with sadness, homesick, depression

Other emotions that are present

Fear and worry with sadness

Sadness mixed with fear shows up for newcomers as reality sinks in: they are starting over, with just about everything. Much of what they worked hard to acquire has little value here. To drive, they must pass a test. To work, they must gain a new credential. To spend money, they must navigate a different banking system. So many of the strategies and tactics people used to get things done just don’t work in a Canadian context. For example, for a segment of Arabic-speaking refugees, interacting with women in a public service context, without the use of bribes or forceful rhetoric, feels slow and unproductive.

The usual ways people access help and support are no longer available. Instead, they must rely on themselves. Self-reliance, in the absence of knowable resources, can readily surface feelings of incompetence and worthlessness. This is a place for intervention. Stewing in incompetence for too long can breed anger and frustration: two emotions apt at creating negative feedback loops. Indeed, for a handful of refugees such as Mo and Ahmed, fear and worry has transitioned to anger and frustration, and to a point of no return. Services will no longer support them.



Joy, happiness, excitement, confidence and optimism with trust, relief, acceptance and hope

Other emotions that are present

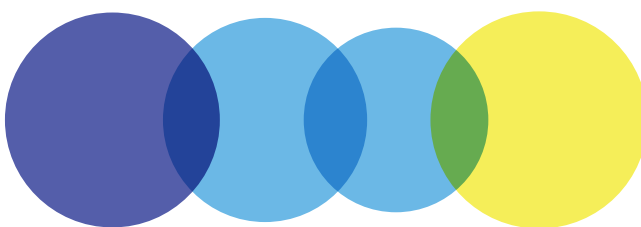
Joy with acceptance and resignation

Filipino youth and their families, in particular, described a combination of joy and acceptance tinged with resignation. Being reunited with their mothers was a real source of anticipation and excitement, but there was also an element of limited agency and choice. They had to come to Canada. In the absence of their mothers, many youth had built alternative support systems, made up of friends and extended family members. Re-gaining their moms meant losing these self-constructed networks — marking the second relational disruption in their lives.

For Arabic-speaking men, regaining agency & control underpinned feelings of joy, trust, pride, and relief. Breaking into the job market, gaining citizenship, and building networks were indicators of status gain, rather than status loss. How might we create more positive identity markers and moments for status lifts?

“I just accepted that I was here and that I had no choice. I had to get used to life here.”
Katrina

“Getting my citizenship made me feel optimism for the future, joy, proudly Canadian and trust of my life. I belong to this country no one can ask me what I am doing here.”
Tamer



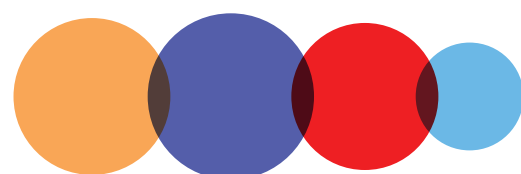
Sadness and homesick with shock, disappointment and surprise

Surprise with joy, relief and excitement

Sadness with surprise, and excitement with surprise

For a handful of Arabic-speaking men we spoke to, coming to Canada was a joyful surprise. People like Waad and Garo described “feeling like human beings for the first time in a long time.” Small actions made big differences. Tamer recounts, “When they said welcome home the first time I came to this country, it really did feel like Canada was home.”

For another group of Arabic-speaking men and Filipino young people, arriving in Canada was a negative surprise. They had high hopes, only to find hidden costs, unfriendly welcome centres, or no real supports. Mo notes, “We were lied to. We now owe \$10,000 for our flights.” One group of Filipino youth, aged 19-24, started working at a factory they day after landing. They’ve never seen downtownToronto.



Doubt, angst with sadness, frustration and surprise

Doubt with sadness, frustration and surprise

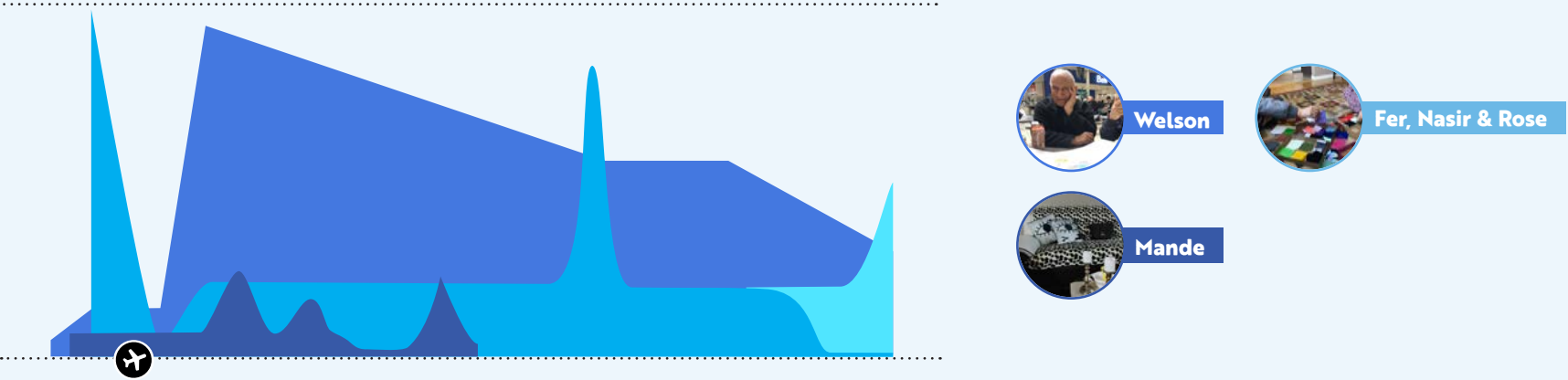
Second guessing one’s choice of coming to Canada is not an *uncommon* sentiment. For those escaping war, there wasn’t any meaningful choice. But, the sense of being caught off guard, of being wholly unprepared for the effects of familial separation and identity loss, is palpable. Rose says, “I wish we never came here.” Tamer recalls thinking, “I know three languages and have a bachelor’s degree. I don’t deserve the positions I’m getting. Why am I here?”

Lived experience:

Three different journey types

We can group newcomers by the emotional shapes of their journeys, clustering individuals and families according to the range and intensities of emotions they experience along the way. By doing so, we can begin to imagine how we might create fit-for-context supports. That is, supports that flow at the right time; that address or prevent the underlying pain; and that attend to people’s motivations and desires.

The Low Downs



The Low Downs’ experience in Canada is demarcated by sadness and loneliness — with punctuations of anger and frustration. They are thankful to be safe, but disappointed by what they see as their stuck and staccato life. Family tension and separation casts a long shadow. Cultural taboos (like: don’t air your dirty laundry in public and don’t show your feelings) have been reinforced by services staffed with Arabic-speakers, giving this segment few options for constructive problem-solving.

Past experience of discrimination shapes their present day interactions: this segment is used to being ‘othered’ whether because of their religious views, their disability, and/or their minority status. Feelings of judgement weigh this segment down. Many find it hard to sleep. Others cast their eyes downward when they talk. Their body wears the stress.

What this segment seems to long for is a sense of mastery & accomplishment; acceptance & belonging; and relational trust. They want to feel useful. They want to feel included. They want to feel heard. They want to be surrounded by people they believe have their back.

“I wish we never came here. I do not remember being sad or upset back home, even if I was I would have talked to my mom, sisters and family to forget about my sadness. We were under war with Iran for 8 years but we were happy, we never felt fear or sadness because we were all together.”

Rose

Within The Low Downs, there are a few sub-groupings of newcomers to pay attention to:

The Rising Resenters — from the Older & Disabled Newcomer Quick Dive

These are folks with rising feelings of resentment, rooted in a sense of unfairness and unhelpful help. Life wasn’t supposed to be like this. Services have only added to the stress. Desperate to contribute, and get out of their downward spiral, they find closed doors but are too busy putting out fires to find the open windows. Money is one of those pervasive worries that shuts doors, and underscores the status loss they have experienced since coming to Canada.

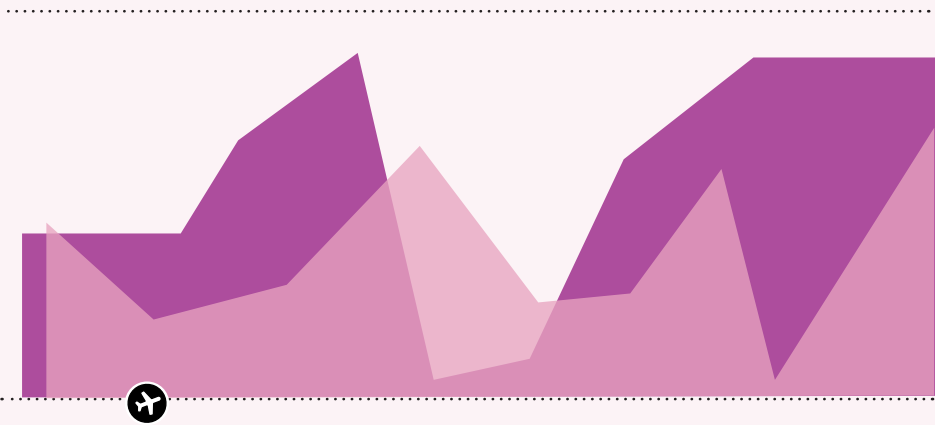
The Used To Be Somebodies — from the Filipino Quick Dive

People, particularly boys & men, who feel beholden to the dominant work-and-contribute imperative, lack a counter narrative, and are living the disappointment of not meeting their own and others’ expectations. For those used to status back in the Philippines, the sense of loss coupled with dependency is particularly disempowering. With little choice and control, plus a shifting landscape of responsibilities, they either withdraw or seek status through more risky means.

The Lost Boys — from the Filipino Quick Dive

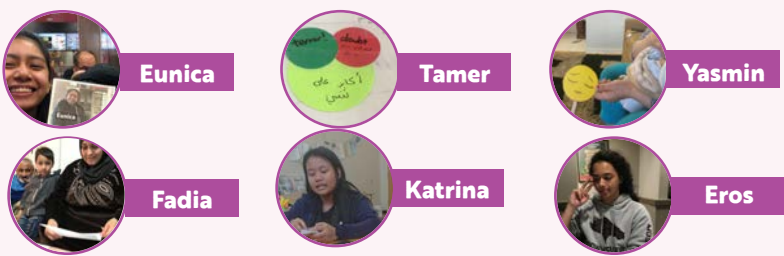
Recently arrived from The Philippines to reunify with their moms, these are young men going straight into jobs often secured prior to their arrival. Although they often have degrees in subjects like psychology and architecture from university back home, they are working long days on the factory floor, surrounded by other Filipino men. Without much free time or a way to engage in the broader community, they stick to themselves, living an insular life. Their primary source of information and their only broker to the outside world are their equally busy moms.

The Roller Coasters



For the Roller Coasters, emotional life oscillates **between loneliness and connection, anxiety and pride**. Katrina and Eros, both Filipino newcomers, struggled to find meaningful connections and feel understood. Katrina spent days in her room, crying, not wanting to talk. She even uninstalled messenger. Eros, by contrast, spent days out of the house, engaging with the ‘wrong’ kinds of people. He reflects, “I had friends, but I didn’t love them, I was just with them.” That’s also been the experience of Arabic-speaking refugees like Ahmed and Israr whose **social interactions have felt deeply unsatisfying**. Many use the word “numb” to describe what it is like to be alone, even when in the company of others, and not find true camaraderie. Addiction, self-harm and suicidal ideation show up as cries for help for some in this segment.

These extreme lows are attenuated by new informal relationships. Katrina reached out to a teacher, who normalized her loneliness. Eros sought out a new peer group at school. Both took steps after seeking information online, from blogs and books. Both were wanting community; they didn’t see their challenge as a mental health illness so much as a social craving. The same was true for refugees like Tamer and Fadia, whose sad and lonely moments, were lifted by community dinners, playing soccer, and going to shisha lounges. Playing cards and dominos gives Tamer an outlet. Making and sharing food gives Fadia an outlet — if only it was more than once a month.



Within The Roller Coasters, there are a couple of sub-groupings of newcomers to pay attention to:

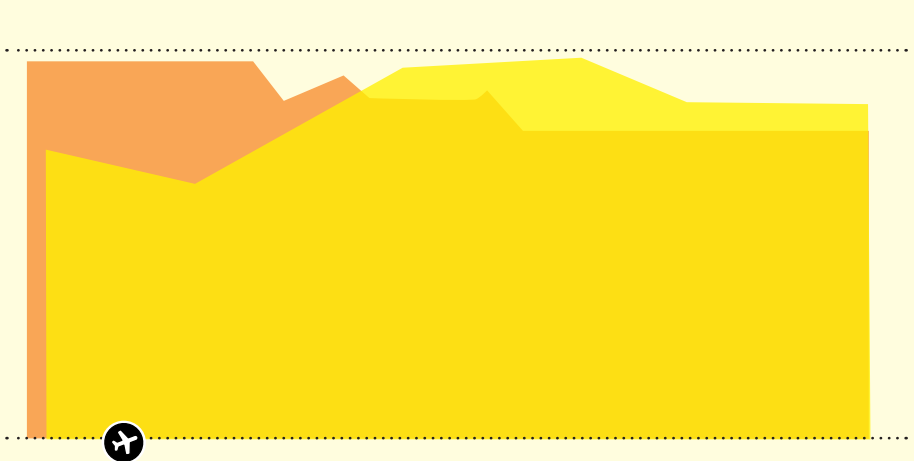
The Where to Start-ers - from the Arabic-speaking refugee Quick Dive

Those explicitly looking for a way forward, but feeling stuck and unsure how to start. They achieved professional success in Syria and Iraq but are immobilized by both practical and psychological barriers (language, age, health, unfamiliar contexts, fear) to reach the same status here. Many were sponsored by family and have their basic needs met, but they want to use their time to have greater purpose and meaning. They are unaware of opportunities for meaningful engagement in community or for a more stimulating social life and feel by routines such as going to ESL class or the mall food courts, and Tim Horton’s. They congregate with folks like them in some ways but feel stuck and aspire to adventure and greater purpose. Natural leaders, these folks want to be recognized for more, but can’t find the entryway.

The Bored and Broke - from the Older & Disabled Newcomer Quick Dive

These are people with high engagement with health care & social systems, whose days are filled with meetings and appointments. Not only does their disability leave them feeling out of control, their schedule is not under their control. They miss feeling useful and actively contributing — and aren’t quite sure how to (re)gain a sense of agency and purpose . Do they have to downgrade their expectations because of their disability or age?

The Upsides

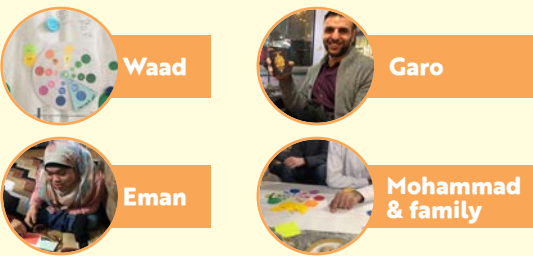


“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” might well be the mantra for **The Upsides, the segment of newcomers who’ve found ways to maintain their initial hopefulness and optimism**. It’s not that life is easy: it’s full of challenges and anxieties, from financial insecurity to jobs well beneath their former paygrade. And yet, these folks are able to take a different perspective because they seem to have a more diversified resource base to draw on: from leveraging technology, to drawing on the experience of family already in Canada, to opening themselves up to strangers and neighbours. Mohammed and his family, in Surrey for three months now, look at the unknown as an adventure. Riding the bus for the first time is an adventure. Getting on skytrain is an adventure. Going to the grocery store is an adventure. In a way, they’ve gamified their experience, developing a new conceptualization of risk and reward.

The same is true for Garo, who re-conceptualized the gym as a place for both working out and working connections. Online job applications didn’t materialize much. Nor did official employment programs. Rather than steep in the frustration, Garo was able to find a place that would increase his odds for opportunity. A place with heaps of social capital plus space for fortuity. Garo notes, “The gym was the best place for networking possibilities; there is a mix of so many people, CEO’s included.”

The Upsides are decidedly ambitious, and decidedly tactical. With a bit of investment — to stabilize their journeys — they are a real asset for others in the community. Indeed, if the energies and experiences of The Upsides could be recognized and resourced earlier in their newcomer journey, they might have a real knock-on effect on others.

People like



Within The Upsides, there are a couple of sub-groupings of newcomers to pay attention to:

The Forward Movers — from the Arabic-speaking refugee Quick Dive

Those who have formed a clear picture of what their future will look like, rooted in strong reference points of what theirs or their family’s life was like before the war: higher education, professional jobs, big houses and lots of cars. Life might be challenging now, but they believe their social capital, hard work, and optimistic mindset will help them climb back up the ladder. Achievement and network-building are clear values, and value propositions that leverage this are likely to attract and engage this group.

The Integrators — from the Filipino Quick Dive

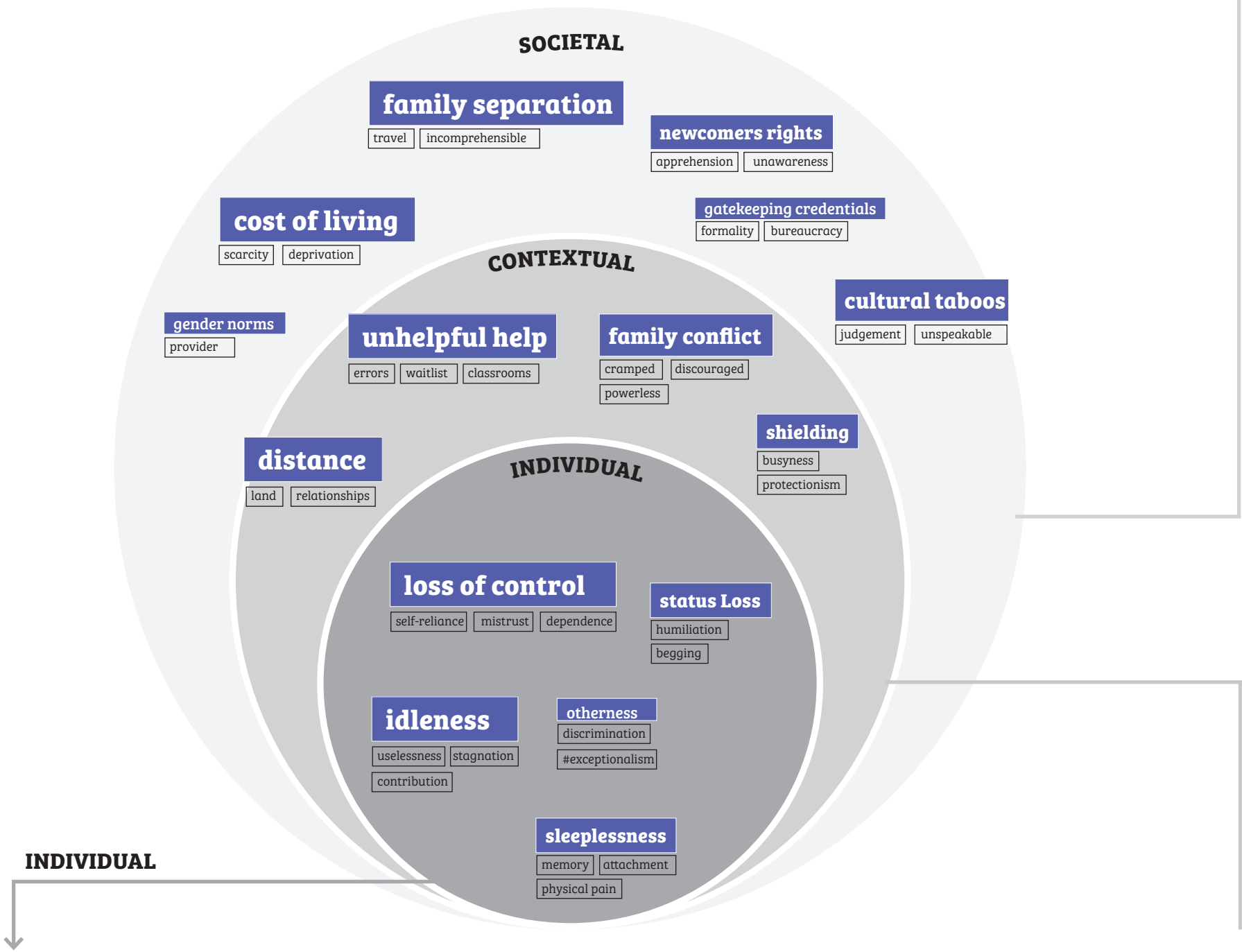
Those who intentionally seek out friendships or settings with non-Filipinos while continuing to nurture ties to Filipino culture. For some, not speaking Tagalog may have been a push factor. For others, they may have been ostracized from their peer group because they look or interact differently. Still for others, opportunities to take on roles outside of, or between, Filipino communities put them in different company. As a result, The Integrators are more exposed to different pathways, identities, and value sets and have a bit more reflective space to weave their own story together.

Gaps and opportunities

Barriers to emotional health	30-31
Enablers of emotional health	32-33
Desired outcomes	34
The service landscape	35-39

Barriers to emotional health

What contributes to newcomers’ emotional doldrums? For the Low Downs and the Roller Coasters, we identified a range of factors — some at an individual level, some at an interpersonal level, and some at a societal level — weighing people down and negatively impacting their emotional health. These factors are points of leverage: turn them around, and potentially turn around people’s emotional health and well-being. How, then, might we design interventions to get underneath some of these factors?



Loss of control

Coming to a new country where you don’t speak the language and don’t know how things work is an inherently **disorienting** experience. To get by, you must rely on others: government workers, service providers, translators, etc. It’s all too easy to **loose trust** in yourself — particularly as the domains you lack control over pile up: employment, health, school, etc.

What would it look like if every newcomer was given complete control over a domain — a project, access to dollars, something, that was fully in their wheelhouse?

Idleness

Newcomers initially have a flurry of activities to do: sort out paperwork, identification, health care, housing, schools. Language classes can take up a lot of time, but progress can **feel slow**. For many older adults, particularly men, sitting in a classroom feels **unproductive**. They want to be on the move. Not doing much perpetuates feelings of **futility and uselessness** — which underpin both sadness and frustration. Mary acknowledges, “You have to have something to do to feel useful in life, I can’t just sit at home all day.”

What would it look like for newcomers to earn money, build up credit, or pay the debt of coming here with acts of contribution?

Otherness

In Canada, Mo finds that Arabic-speaking people are lumped together in one category. But, he sees important distinctions. Not all Arabic-speakers are alike. So while outsiders ‘other’ refugees like him, he also ‘others’ himself from the rest of the refugee pool. The unrequited narrative of exceptionalism can generate feelings of **frustration and disgust**.

How might newcomers get more of a choice of the communities they want to join, and what their affiliations and associations might be?

Sleeplessness

Sleeping can be elusive for some, and **terrifying** for others. Fadia is in too much **physical pain** to sleep. Nasir just sees the violence. Bagani stays up super late to talk to friends back home. Doctors prescribe pills for pain and pills for sleep, but still, the nights fade slowly. Pain management isn’t something we’ve heard introduced to folks, nor are their supports available late at night, even though we know that inability to sleep is linked with poor emotional health and decision-making. Interestingly, many of the Arabic-speaking refugees spoke wistfully of a 24-hour culture, with an active nightlife to ward of the blues.

What would it look like to create different night time supports and routines?

Status Loss

For many newcomers (outside of the economic class), coming to Canada means leaving behind much of your identity: your country, your profession, your community affiliation, your family role, and much of the source of your know-how. Although much has been written about the loss of professional standing, it’s the accumulation of status losses that can be staggering, shaping feelings of **fear, shame, and humiliation**. Mario gave up his job as a school principal and his role as the primary parent to come to Canada, only to find himself jobless, divorced, and without access to his son. It’s not just direct experience with status loss that impacts on emotional health. Eunica is watching her dad go through an identity crisis, and feeling the **stress**. Mo feels he is practically at the point of begging for a way to be the provider of his family again.

What would it look like for newcomers to gain status, not just lose status? What new or alternative sources of status might they acquire?

Cultural Taboos

Every culture has no-go zones: conversation topics that are off limits, niceties that mask honest realities. The challenge is when services, staffed by workers of the same culture or language group as the newcomer, reinforce rather than confront those taboos. A sizeable number of Arabic-speaking refugees recounted that they felt more “**judged**” by Arabic-speaking workers than accepted. The taboos from their country were still true here, and they were not being introduced to alternative frameworks or options.

What if newcomer support staff came in pairs — someone who speaks your language plus someone from another cultural perspective — to broaden reference points and introduce a range of approaches?

Newcomer rights

Whether it’s Filipino mothers working overtime as nannies, refugees whose benefits have been affected by a move, or newcomers with complaints about services, nobody we met was aware of where to go to resolve problems, particularly if the problem had to do with the settlement service they were attached to. Often, this compounded feelings of **helplessness and lack of control**. Newcomers described the orientation they went to before arriving in Canada as pretty basic: they remember learning about calling 9-1-1.

What would it look like if newcomers were upskilled as advocates?

Cost of living

Costs are high in cities, higher than most newcomers understood coming-in, and is a major source of **anxiety and fear**. Cars and car insurance is expensive. Food is expensive. Housing is expensive. Translation services are expensive. Worry about money can become a flashpoint: it’s hard to think of much else when it feels dire, and when you’re in a mindset of scarcity.

What fresh financial approaches and models could be used to address high costs (e.g co-ops, sharing & maker economy, lending circles, etc.)?

Gatekeeping & credentials

Mohammed’s first impression of Canada was its love of process. “There is a lot of bureaucracy,” he found. Getting anything done requires going through motions, and unlike the context he was used to, there weren’t relational work-arounds (such as bribes). The formality of applying for jobs — cover letters, resumes with the right credentials, interviews — felt **impersonal and frustrating**. Similarly, the formality of a health care system that requires referrals and official translators only exacerbated already long wait times, and the feeling of **not being in control**. Every step of the way seemed to have another gate.

What if gate keepers were gate openers/ What would it look like if newcomers had more fluency in bureaucratic tactics?

Gender norms

Still in 2019, steeped into the social milieu is the notion that men are the providers. Even though Filipino women have brought home the bacon, so to speak, for men, coming to Canada, watching the women in their life get jobs and navigate life can feel **de-masculating**. For Arabic-speaking men, being a provider is linked to an identity of action, outside the home, procuring resources, making decisions, and being a role model. Too often, services are interpreted as mediating proper action - a situation in which resources are bestowed by a worker or claimed by a newcomer, but not earned. Ultimately, many men feel **stymied** by a system that itself plays the provider, contributing to feelings of **redundancy, incompetence, shame and humiliation**.

Family separation

Grappling with the family members left behind was one of the most recurring concerns. Arabic-speaking refugees spoke of the **confusion and pain** of family separation: of not understanding why certain members of their family were admitted to Canada, and others not, and desperately looking for a way to help them. Little information was available to explain the decision-making process, or to clarify the process going forward. Newcomers consistently asked us, as researchers, to help. Adding to the feelings of **desperation and helplessness** was knowing they could not leave Canada until they became citizens. For adults under the age of 55, they worried they would not pass the citizenship requirements, and would be stuck for many years without a way to visit family members or be present for important life events.

What if there were tools to mediate family separation and feel more present? What would it look like to have more process clarity?

CONTEXTUAL

Shielding

It was more common than uncommon for newcomers to lack an outlet for their feelings. They didn’t want to burden family members who they perceived as busy; they didn’t want to worry family members back home; they didn’t want to bother new friends; they weren’t really sure how they themselves were feeling. Eros said, “I never told anyone how I felt because no one really asked for real.” Kat looked up resources for depression online, but didn’t want to seek formal help because she didn’t want her mom to panic. Wilson thinks sharing his feelings is futile: “in this age it doesn’t work.”

What if having an outlet for emotions was as common was as normalized as going to the gym?

Distance

It’s obvious: newcomers face both physical and emotional distance from their homelands. Perhaps less obvious is the types of distance individuals describe: distance from the lands (the scents, the colours, the vegetation, the climate), from their typical routines (large gatherings, night life), and from their closest relationships. Shaka speaks wistfully of the olive groves in her backyard. Jameel speaks fondly of the car he left behind, and the roads he quite literally traveled down. Rose describes the smell of Filipino street food.

What would it look like to match newcomers to lands that are a little more like their homeland, or to enable newcomers to plant, set-up, and recreate aspects of their homelands?

Family conflict

Family is what led many newcomers to Canada: rejoining loved ones, ensuring the safety of loved ones, creating a future life for loved ones. And yet, once here, interpersonal conflicts, old wounds & rifts, cramped quarters and relational stressors can build to a boiling point. Where to turn? Newcomers **worry** taking a legal approach to family events like abuse and divorce will threaten their immigration status. Nasir, Rose and Fer were **discouraged** by settlement workers to use the legal system. Mario doesn’t feel like he’s got the power to resolve things: his (ex) wife knows more English, has a job, and a network. Eros doesn’t want to rock the boat with his mom; he doesn’t really know her.

What if there were supports for families in stress, perhaps leveraging practices like mediation and family therapy?

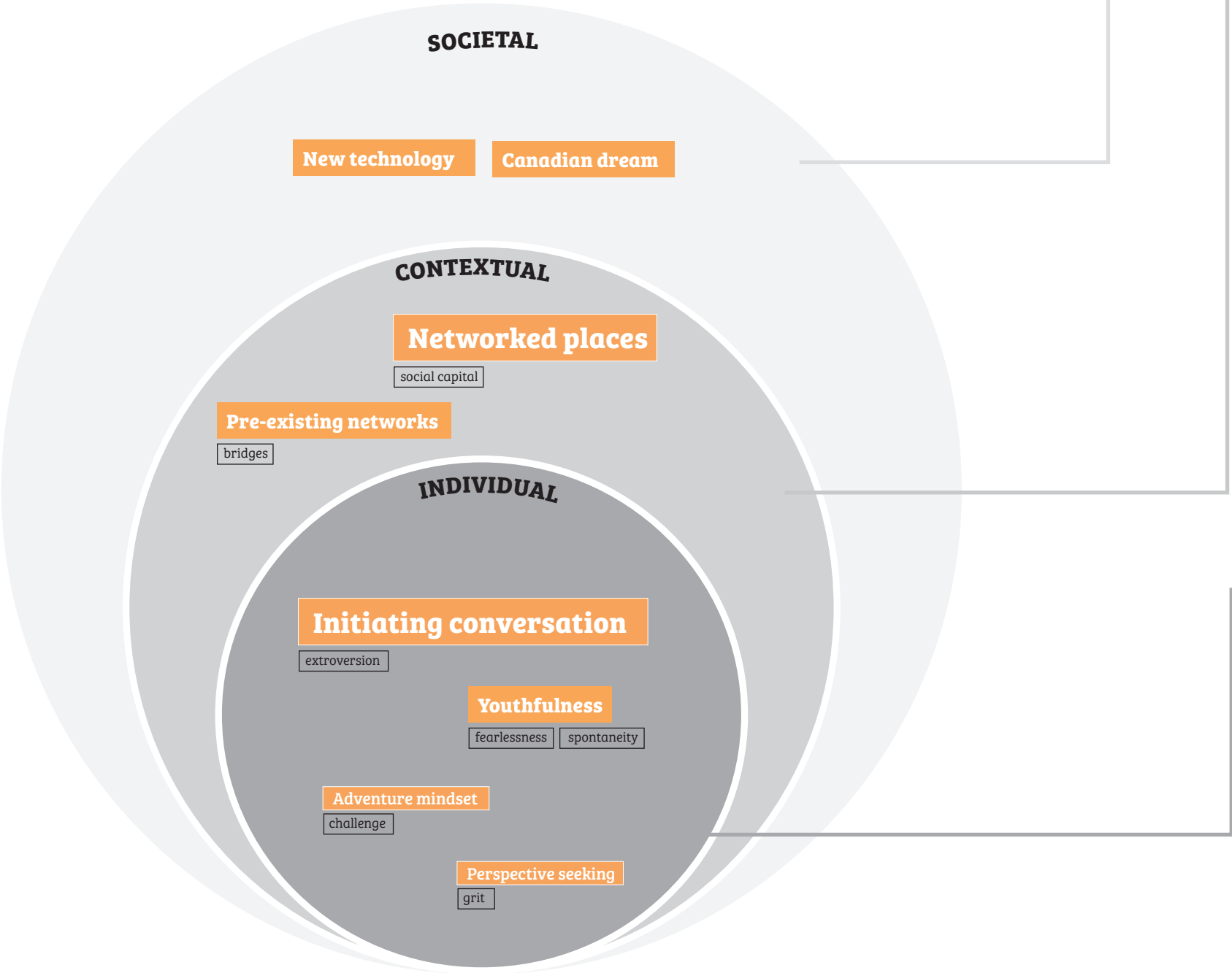
Unhelpful Help

Mande blames a paperwork error for the continued separation from her husband. Mo blames frontline workers for placing him in a house far from schools and supports. Kat blames doctors for misdiagnosing her dad with cancer. For a group of newcomers, experiences with services have left them feeling **helpless**. Fadia used to bring friends along to the hospital to translate; they are no longer allowed to do that, and she can’t afford the fee-for-service. Mohammed finds classroom-based language services unproductive: he learns best outside of a classroom, interacting with people. Newcomers with concerns about services **don’t know** where to turn, or what their recourse is. Complaints don’t really go anywhere, and in their view, put them at risk of worse services. Their style and approach to addressing dissatisfaction may also be counterproductive.

What if there were mechanisms for newcomers to give feedback and gain access to advocacy to navigate service systems?

Enablers of emotional health

What seems to enable newcomers’ emotional resiliency? For the Upsides, who trend younger, they’ve learned a set of socio-emotional skills and have a fluency with technology that seems to be serving them well. They are also in a social context that breeds fortuity, spontaneity and connection. How, then, might we bring these enablers to more newcomers? What environmental conditions can we create to increase the likelihood of well-being and well-living?



SOCIETAL

New technology

Technology is constantly improving, and changing how we communicate and interact across boundaries. Whether its google translate, google earth, language apps, or home assistants, there’s a growing set of tools that can bust barriers and potentially close gaps. The Upsides are using technology in a more sophisticated way than most — and yet also aren’t up-to-date with the latest programs and apps. Internet can be expensive and having more equipment at home would help. What would it look like to bring smart technology to the newcomer experience?

Canadian dream

The idea of the Canadian dream: of living a peaceful, secure, opportunity-filled life can be a mythology for some, and a reality for others. The Upsides have internalized the narrative, and are holding Canada to account for it: they are able to self-advocate when they see a gap, call out stigma & discrimination, and hold the big-picture vision even when the going gets tough.

CONTEXTUAL

Pre-existing networks

One advantage that the Upsides have is a family member or friend already in Canada. Being able to tap into a pre-existing network gives a head start, both in terms of understanding how things work and brokering to tangible opportunities, even if they are the ideal ones. A relative set-up Tamer with a restaurant job, which wasn’t what he wanted, but was seen as a “bridge for reaching further goals.” How could more newcomers hit the ground running?

Networked places

The Upsides have found places to go, in the community, that increase the likelihood of fortuitous connections and network building. For Garo, it’s the gym. For Wilson, it’s the shisha bar. For Mohammed, it’s the mosque. For Eros, it’s a classroom at school. These places are informal in nature, draw a diverse mix of folks (i.e not just other newcomers), and aren’t oriented around help and support. People can be more on equal footing in these spaces and ladder to opportunities. What would it look like for newcomers to have more informal (and socially diverse) places to go?

INDIVIDUAL

Youthfulness

More in spirit, than necessarily age, newcomers on the incline seem to have embraced one of the hallmarks of youth: a dose of fearlessness and an openness to spontaneity. They put themselves out there, and seem to be willing to face some rejection. For Garo, for example, it’s a numbers game: meet as many people as possible, and something will materialize.

What would it look like to support more newcomers to approach parts of their transition in the spirit of adolescence?

Adventure mindset

For the Upsides, treating challenges as opportunities for adventure has helped to cut some of the anxiety and fear of doing new things. Riding the bus for the first time, for instance, when framed as an adventure, can seem like less of a daunting task. Maybe even fun. Re-framing everyday tasks as moments for positive challenge sets these newcomers up for learning, and seems to create an openness for opportunities to emerge.

Initiating conversation

“Talk to everyone” seems to be a mantra of many of the Upsides, whose chatty nature enables them to build superficial relationships that, over time, might emerge into more. More connection points seems to create more points for hope. Even where English is a struggle, the Upsides don’t let it stop them, making use of technological work-arounds and body language. Mohammed and his family, for instance, use google translate to write emails and communicate when out and about.

How might more newcomers be equipped with the tools for conversation?

Perspective seeking

Recalling past adversity is another strategy many of the Upsides use to reframe current challenges, and have faith in their grit and capacity. By focusing on stories of where they overcame prior obstacles and suboptimal events, they reinspire themselves to keep on keeping on. Things may be bad, but they have come out the other side of tough times before. Holding on to the memories of mastery seems to offer comfort and reassurance.

How might more newcomers leverage their own positive stories of the past?

What are desired outcomes, anyway?

Since emotions — both the painful and joyous varieties — are part and parcel to the human experience, the question is: what’s a good outcome for newcomers? How might we normalize the emotional journey and build newcomers’ emotional asset bank? Towards what end? Our conversations and observations with newcomers have surfaced a range of desired ends.



Equanimity versus pervasive worry

Stability and composure in the face of challenge; a sense of healing, balance, and restoration. Not feeling so tired, so jumbled, so weathered, so heavy.



Intimacy versus insularity

Having honest and trusting relationships; feeling seen, heard, and understood. Not hiding, disappearing, being alone.

“I never told anyone how I felt because no one really asked for real. But if someone had asked, it would have helped a lot.”



Contribution versus idleness

Sharing time and talents with society; being an active and useful part of community; giving, not just receiving.

“Our role is to do something, to contribute back to Canada.”



Sufficiency versus reliance

Having enough: feeling competent and in control to care for self and loved ones. Not seeing resources as scarce. Not being too dependent or reliant on others.

“We don’t want to beg for money. We want to work in something we want.”



Vitality

Really living: having good food, good company, merriment, celebration, fun.

“Being around people, eating together, you feel you’ve changed the mood of your life.”
“Dancing makes life better”

Service Gaps & Opportunities

Not only did we spend time trying to understand newcomers’ emotional landscapes, we wanted to understand how the existing service landscape is set-up to respond. So we hit the pavement, heading out to services across greater Toronto and the lower Mainland, to see what’s on offer, hear their perspectives, learn how they engaged newcomers and to what ends.

Where did we shadow?

Over three weeks, we visited 23 services in Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey and Toronto. We shadowed services with a focus on newcomer mental health and well-being. We also looked laterally at services which may be helping people process emotions, using different modalities, even if not in the newcomer sector. Some of the services we found through newcomers; some through Options and NYCH staff suggestions, and others from online searches.

The services varied in their service offers. We divided them into nine categories:

- **Support groups:** 2 support groups for LGBTQ2+ newcomers, 1 support group for refugee claimants, 1 activity group for moms and kids
- **English class:** 2 adult EAL classes with a focus on trauma-informed pedagogy
- **Co-op Housing Dinner:** 2 dinners in refugee and refugee claimant co-op housing complexes
- **One-on-one social services:** 1 disability service appointment, 1 settlement service appointment, 1 one-on-one talk therapy appointment
- **One-time workshop:** 2 workshops on emotional wellness, 1 workshop on building solidarity between Indigenous and refugee communities
- **Online service:** 1 pre-arrival online service
- **Healthcare:** 3 clinics targeted towards newcomers; 1 walk-in clinic for youth; 1 dialysis clinic
- **Religious gatherings:** 1 Islamic Centre women’s prayer session
- **Physical activity:** 2 physical activity programs targeted towards seniors



The point of shadowing services was not to critically assess them from the perspective of another service provider, but rather to consider the perspective of a newcomer and imagine what they experience going through that service. We asked, “If I were a newcomer who was looking for an outlet to help with my various emotions, how would this service offer opportunities to engage?” We aimed to identify and then leverage gaps in the servicescape to inform our design.

We asked:

What is this service designed to do, for whom? How do things unfold? What happens first, next, then after that? How do people’s emotions change over the course of their engagement? What strategies are in place?



Where are the opportunities?

Shadowing services allowed us to envision where there may be space for novel approaches & missing supports.

* Catering to men, newcomers with disabilities, and newcomer seniors

We only found 1 service for men that specifically deals with emotions. The organizers did not expect the group of Arabic-speaking dads to open up about their emotions, but by the third session, they found participants eager to share. How can we design interventions that allow for gender & role specific conversations plus make space for joint explorations? We also couldn’t find anything that deals with emotions targeted towards persons with disabilities nor senior newcomers.

* Made with and for newcomers

We found very few services that were co-produced by end users and staff. We found many run by staff who would love to to incorporate more volunteers and peer leadership models, but lack the resources and sometimes the expertise to do so.

* Using movement and touch, rather than words

Most support groups were talk-based, with a few using art-based practices. There’s spae to design therapeutic interventions drawing on non-verbal mediums.

There is one counseling service in Surrey that offers low-cost or free somatic therapy, but it’s sporadically available depending on counsellors’ schedules and only in English. There’s space to incorporate breathwork or other body movement therapies that may be better suited for newcomers who don’t speak English.



What practices might we draw on?

From speaking with service providers, we also identified best existing practices:

Services that allow kids to attend. They accommodate families and single parents who can’t afford childcare, and open up joint conversations.

Physical embrace. At the beginning or ending of a group gathering, a moment of touch (a hug, a dance) fosters a feeling of belonging and togetherness.

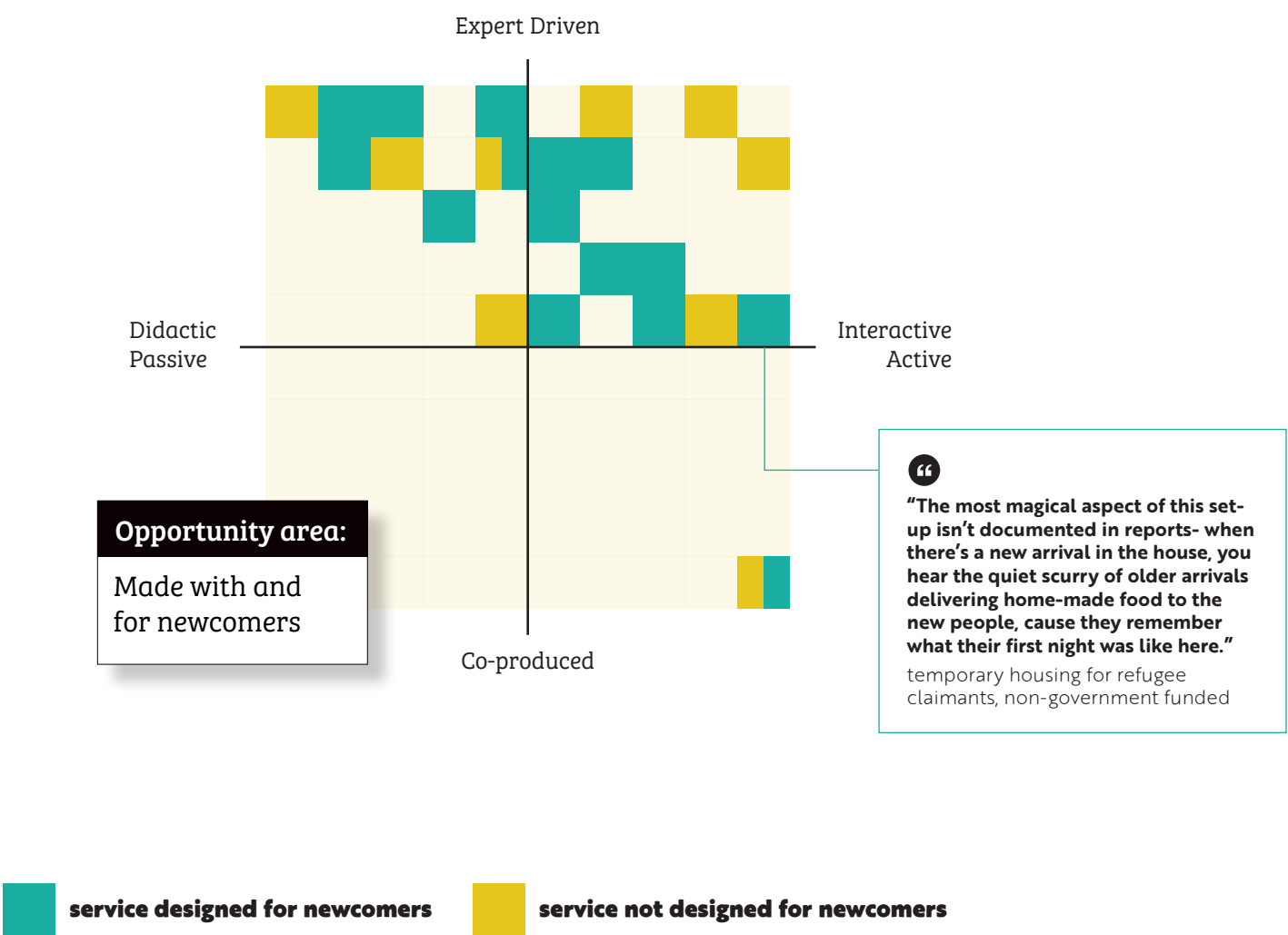
...Yet respecting boundaries. Understanding cultural gender norms allows for better participation. When it comes to sharing emotions, the norm is that women don’t share too much in front of men, and vice versa. Giving men and women space to express emotions matters.

Choice and control. Giving participants the choice to take part or opt out makes showing up less intimidating. Services that allowed for more control in the interactivio n, i.e. letting people serve their own food rather than be served, were most powerful.

Space & timing. Warmer, brighter spaces (particularly those that feel like a house, with a kitchen) engendered more engagement. Late evening & weekend availability is important, particularly for Filipino moms who work 2-3 jobs, along with Arabic-speakers who miss an active night life.

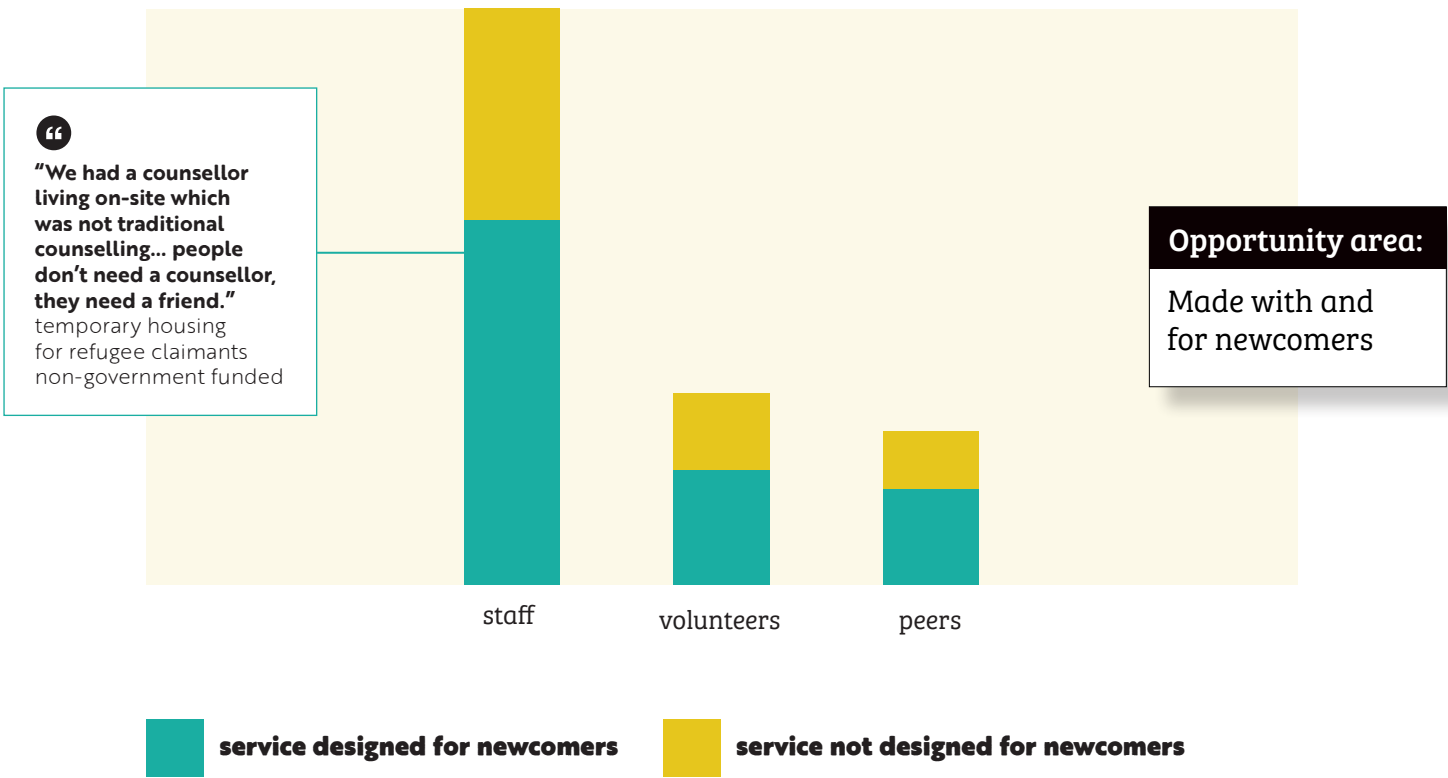
What is the relationship between the people in the service?

Only 2 services we saw were co-produced by the people using them, and catered more to young people than adults. What would it look like to give adult newcomers dollars & mentorship to create their on supports?



Who is the service run by?

We saw many services where staff are in charge of organizing and delivering the session. The ones that gave volunteers and peers a more active role in decision-making inspired us.



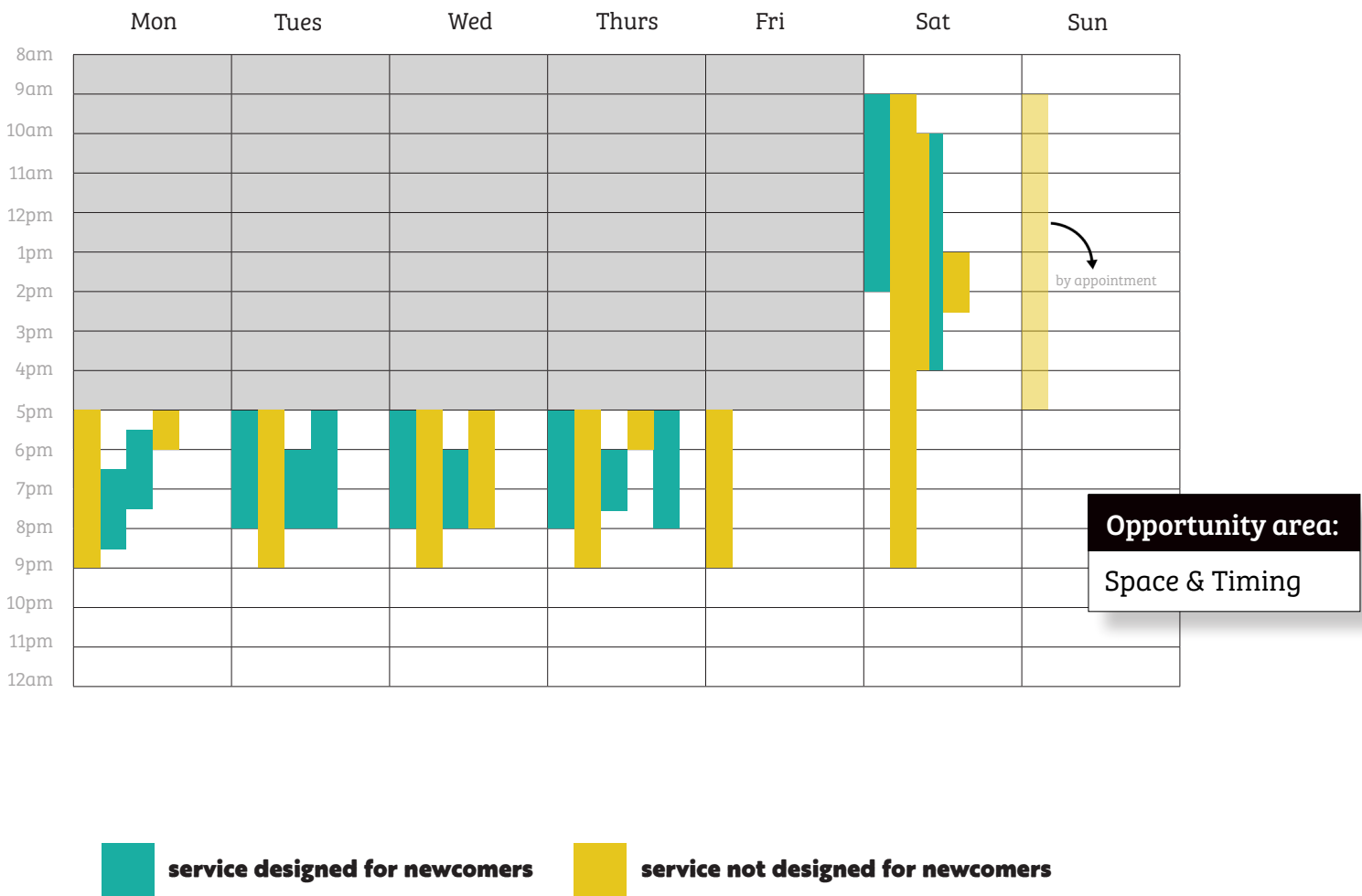
What is the relationship between the people in the service?

Many services don't have a choice of the setting they operate out of; some do. And yet, look & feel shapes the kinds of conversations people have. How might we create more familial, and less clinical, spaces?



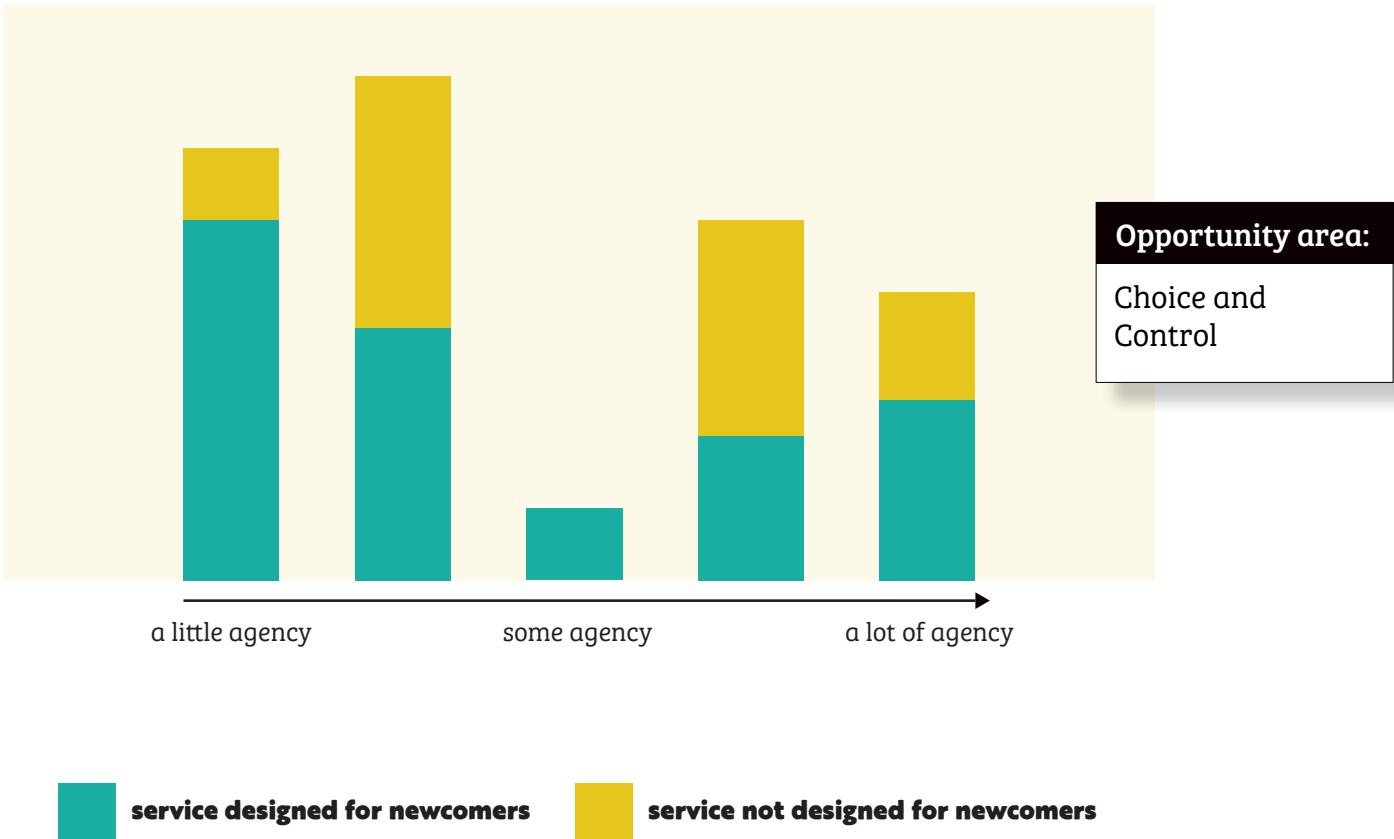
When do services operate outside of typical work hours?

Most services were 9-5. A smattering were open outside of business hours. The most flexible community-based offers (e.g exercise classes) were not specifically geared to newcomers or often utilized by them.



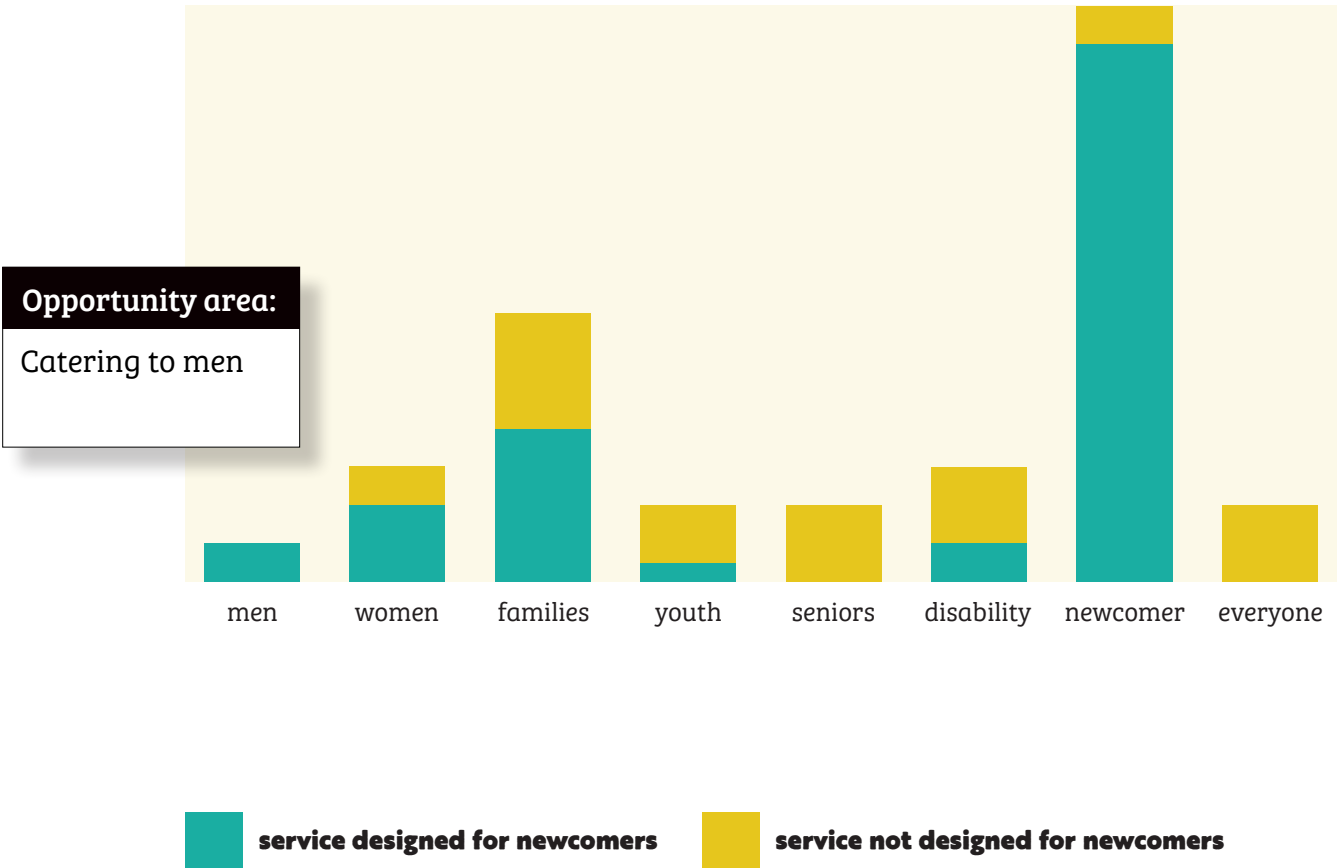
How much choice do people have over how they participate?

In general, many services we saw for newcomers were quite structured (a health clinic) and didn't allow that much choice in how they engaged in the service.



Who is the target audience?

Of the services that dealt with emotions, most catered to a generic audience and did not segment their user groups. Only one service was targeted towards newcomer men, while we didn't find any specific supports for newcomer seniors to give them an outlet to address emotions. None were designed using motivational segments, focused on newcomers with similar journey types.



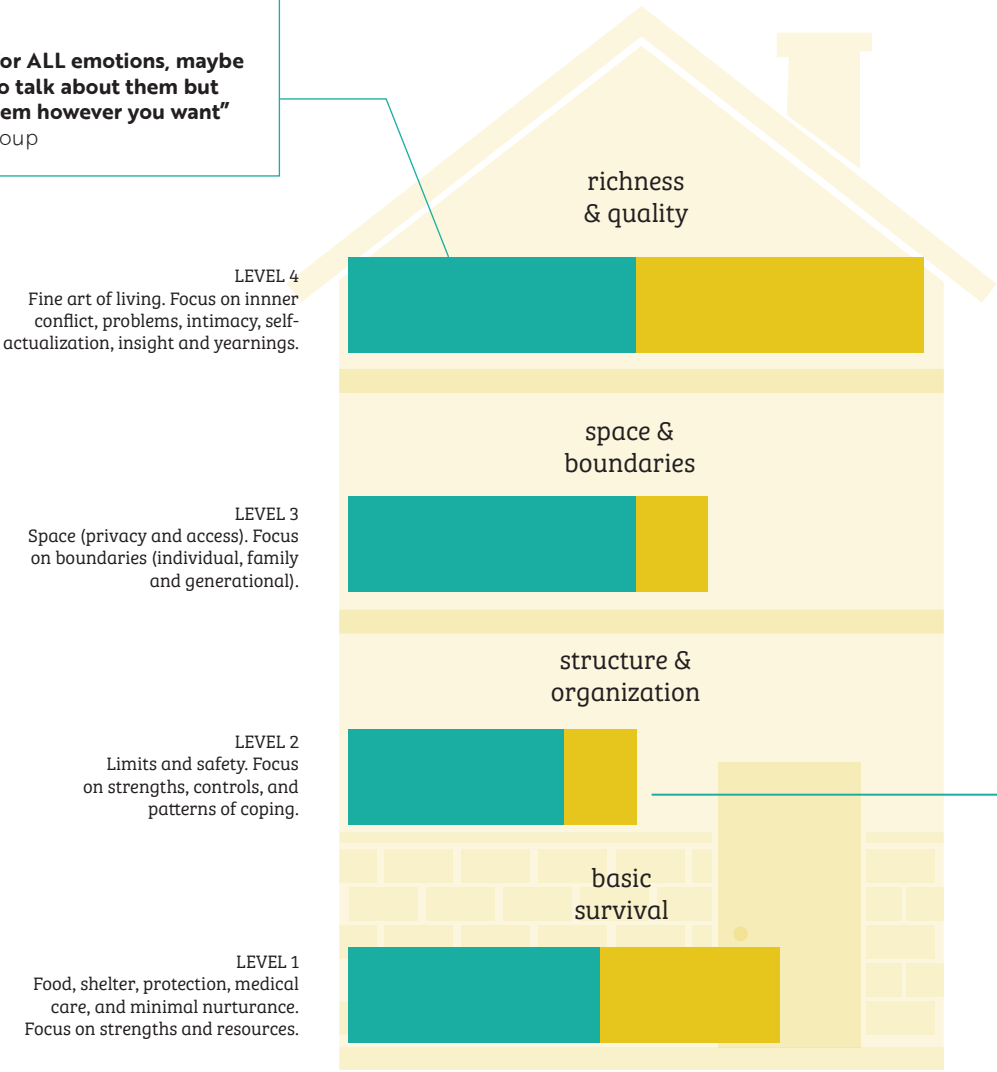
What is the goal of the service?

Using Kilpatrick & Cleveland (1993)’s Levels of Family Needs: Issues and Relevant Interventions, we plotted which level of fulfillment each service aimed to fulfill. We were inspired by how many services are out there with the goal to enhance the richness and quality of life -- and wonder how to support services to increase their impact and broaden their reach to newcomer groups not accessing supports.

“
“This is a space for ALL emotions, maybe you don’t have to talk about them but you can share them however you want”
LGBT support group

Opportunity area:

Catering to newcomer seniors and newcomers with disabilities



“
“The women engaged asking hypothetical questions about what a woman should do, during our unit on emotional abuse, but didn’t open up to share personally.”
Trauma informed ESL

service designed for newcomers service not designed for newcomers

CLOSING WORDS

Academic research + Lived experience + Service gaps = possibilities!

Looking across theories and empirical evidence of emotional health, newcomers' own experiences, and existing services opens up so many opportunity spaces. When in the newcomer journey might we intervene? What could alternative trajectories and transitions look and feel like? How might we enable different outcomes?

Imagine if we embraced the hard emotions, and made more space for gratitude, awe, contentment, pride, love, compassion and desire? These are the emotions Confucius, writing centuries ago, calls jen. Jen is bringing goodness out. And that shouldn't just be a newcomer outcome, but a human outcome.



Enter Elevate, a board game to generate ideas for what could be.

The aim: brainstorm heaps of ideas, rooted in the everyday stories of newcomers, and inspired by international case studies and academic literature.

We see ideas as provocations: opening-up space for dialogue and co-design.

Somewhere in the pile of ideas will be a handful of hidden gems: diamonds in the rough for us to further visualize and mock-up, moving from early concepts on paper to small-scale testing in the real world. Help us get from here to breakthrough ideas.



The game starts by choosing a mission informed by the research:

MISSION 1

What if we replaced the mythology of Canada as the land of milk and honey with new kinds of content about life in Canada, to re-calibrate expectations for resettlement and enhance emotional resiliency?

MISSION 3

How might we enable newcomers to recognize and attend to unresolved grief and loss, and have the capacity to live with the past, embrace the present, and go after the future?

MISSION 5

What if the emotional journey to Canada was an intentionally designed experience, from the day you applied? One that consciously built resiliency beliefs, coping skills and relational resources along the way? (See page 11)

MISSION 7

What if newcomers had ways to save money from day one, as an investment in a fulfilling Canadian life for themselves, their families, and/or their communities? In a way that promotes agency, choice, and contribution?

MISSION 9

What if there were responses to sleeplessness beyond pills? Nighttime supports, communal sleep hygiene routines, or inclusive nightlife? To make nights less difficult, lonely, sleepless, or long?

MISSION 11

What if we segmented newcomers by emotional blends, in order to give expression to complex emotions and respond to them with appropriate supports, experiences, and networks?

MISSION 13

What if newcomers co-produced rather than received services? Taking on roles that increased their own self-awareness, and sense of contribution, while learning practices like art, music, or somatic therapy, and alternative treatments for pain?

MISSION 2

What if we closed the distance gap for family and friends at opposite ends of the earth? Perhaps by re-imagining or replacing the standard texts, calls, or video conferences to allow for greater intimacy & contribution?

MISSION 4

What if we turned waiting from dead time into productive time, and enabled people to build up their emotional asset bank?

MISSION 6

What if newcomers were able to build networks outside of their cultural and language groups, and increase a sense of belonging and affiliation to other people and places in Canada?

MISSION 8

What if language learning felt like a catalyst for life in Canada - producing optimism, trust, joy, pride, and sense of control - rather than a source of boredom, fear, anxiety, and frustration, an obstacle to establishing life in Canada?

MISSION 10

What if newcomers were exposed to alternative success narratives, ones that emphasized positive emotional outcomes, like equanimity, intimacy, contribution, sufficiency, and vitality, not just material symbols of them (eg. owning a big house)?

MISSION 12

What if there were better ways to match newcomers to communities, across the vast expanse of Canada? Going beyond weather to understand the look, feel, and character of a place and its people?



Let's play!

Let's get generative.

Let's get lateral.

Let's play Elevate!