

Transcript – understanding the human service system is crucial for newcomers

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We know that newcomers, regardless of their context of reception, have specific needs and I would say the biggest need is for them to understand the system - how things work. So instead of just specific information that we want to give to a newcomer the biggest service we can do to them is just to give them a sense of what we call the information landscape. How do things work in Canada? How is the system organized? Think of it as a frame. You come from a different place where the framing of how things work was in a certain way and you move, you shift to a new space, a new place. We have to reframe our understanding of how things work.

How do I get a job? How does the the labour, the employment sector work in my area? What do I need to do to go back to university or to put my kids in school? What do I need to do about x? What do I need to know.

So it's in terms of information seeking, that's the biggest thing, is really to provide people with an understanding of how things work here.

And with that goes issues around language, the terminology. They may not know how things are named here. So that's a little bit hard when you want to do a search because you don't have the right keywords, you don't know exactly what are the terms that will elicit the kind of information you need the most. So a focus on the terminology, a focus on an overview of the system whether it's the healthcare system, the labour market, the housing system, whatever it is that people need. And also a knowledge of the kinds of resources that are out there, the information sources.

Again I cannot emphasize enough the fact that we take for granted many services that we have, information sources, and information services. People don't know.

We need to almost market our services and tell people - look this is what we can do for you. In places like in Germany and in other places when they don't have a settlement sector, so a refugee who has first gone to Germany and then come to Canada may just think there's no such thing as a settlement sector. They don't even know what a settlement sector does.

So really starting at that level, and explaining how things work in Canada and what you as a settlement worker can do for them, and what you cannot do. But what you can do as well.

