

**SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK  
IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES  
NEIGHBOURHOOD FRIENDS AND FAMILY  
PEER CHAMPIONS CAMPAIGN**

Ontario Council for Immigrant Serving Agencies  
Toronto, ON

**Area of Practice:**

- Anti-Racism Dialogues and Initiatives
- Strategies for Engagement with Non-Settlement Service Providers

**Video:**

[INSERT]

A Pathways to  
Prosperity Project

March 2020

Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada



**PATHWAYS TO  
PROSPERITY**  
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



**VOIES VERS LA  
PROSPÉRITÉ**  
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

## **BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM**

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The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) is a non-profit agency based in Toronto, ON. Formed in 1978, it acts as a collective voice for immigrant serving agencies in Ontario, coordinating responses to shared needs and concerns. Its membership comprises more than 200 community-based organizations. It also serves immigrant and refugee communities in Ontario by developing policies and programs that are implemented by member organizations.

The Immigrant and Refugee Communities Neighbourhood Friends and Family (IRCNFF) Campaign was launched in 2012 to raise awareness about the warning signs of woman abuse and promote bystander intervention within immigrant and refugee communities across Ontario. Research had shown that in most cases of lethal domestic violence in Ontario, a neighbour, friend, or family member had known there was a problem beforehand, but did not know how to help. In many cases, immigrant and refugee women sought advice from a friend, family member, or community member rather than a service provider. Since 2016, the IRCNFF Campaign has focused on expanding its reach by recruiting Peer Champions across Ontario, training them in violence against women prevention, and supporting them to host events in their communities.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM**

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**Name:**

Immigrant and Refugee Communities Neighbourhood Friends and Family Peer Champions Campaign

**Description:**

The Immigrant and Refugee Communities Neighbourhood Friends and Family (IRCNFF) Peer Champions Campaign is an Ontario-wide initiative coordinated by the Ontario Council for Immigrant Serving Agencies (OCASI) to raise awareness about violence against women in immigrant and refugee communities. Peer Champions act as ambassadors for the IRCNFF Campaign in their communities. After being selected, they complete online and in-person training on violence against women prevention and learn how to hold educational events that raise awareness and promote action. After their training, Peer Champions design and run two educational events in their communities about the prevention of violence against women. Peer Champions act as ambassadors for the IRCNFF Campaign in their communities as well as liaisons between service providers, civic society leaders, and community members. Peer Champions receive a \$1,000 honorarium for their work.

**Goal(s):**

The goal of the IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is to educate communities across Ontario to recognize the signs and risks of violence against women and equip them with the necessary tools to support women experiencing domestic violence.

**Target Client Group(s):**

Immigrant and refugee communities across Ontario

**Delivery Partner(s):**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is co-delivered with all agencies, organizations, and groups serving immigrants and refugees in Ontario.

**Human Resource(s):**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is delivered by one program coordinator, as well as Peer Champions who are recruited and trained each year. Former Peer Champions are also engaged in the program as ambassadors, mentors, and advisors.

**Funding:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services through the Office of Women's Issues.

**KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE**

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**Effective:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign works with community leaders who have strong relationships with immigrants, refugees, and organizations in their communities. Peer Champions are trained to identify, refer, and support newcomer women experiencing violence, and receive ongoing support to organize events, connect with local agencies, and do outreach in their communities. The program builds on the strengths of its Peer Champions, drawing on their culturally- and locally-specific knowledge to provide sensitive and responsive support.

**Efficient:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is coordinated at the provincial level and run in multiple communities across the province. While recruitment, resources, and training are done centrally, content can be tailored to meet the specific needs of different communities. The program draws on existing knowledge and connections and builds capacity within different communities.

**Relevant:**

While violence against women affects all communities, immigrant and refugee women who experience violence often face additional challenges or barriers, such as lack of knowledge or access to local services / resources, ostracism, isolation, and fear of deportation. The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign draws on existing knowledge and connections in the community and builds capacity to increase awareness of the effects of violence against women in immigrant and refugee communities and the ways in which it can be addressed.

**Sustainable:**

Peer Champions continue to play an active role in their communities after completing their term. Many Peer Champions remain engaged in the IRCNFF Campaign as program ambassadors, mentors, and advisors.

**Transferable:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign could be replicated by other organizations across Canada. All materials and resources could be made available to any organization wishing to implement a similar program.

**Innovative and Forward Thinking:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign engages local community leaders to ensure that resources and events are relevant and culturally sensitive. The program is designed to break down barriers and reduce isolation for immigrant and refugee women experiencing violence in Ontario.

**Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign can be adapted to meet the specific needs of various immigrant and refugee communities across Ontario. It is supported and carried out by individuals who are strong leaders in their communities.

**High Client Uptake:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign has high client uptake. Its Peer Champions are local leaders who are already deeply engaged in their communities. They are also interested in developing skills so that they can better support women experiencing violence and create safer communities.

**High Client Retention:**

The majority of Peer Champions remain engaged in the IRCNFF Campaign throughout their term and beyond. During their term, they are supported through monthly phone calls and quarterly meetings / training workshops that increase their understanding of gender-based violence and support their leadership skills development. They also receive an honorarium for their work in the community.

**Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:**

The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign has monitored and tracked progress since the launch of the program. Between 2016-2018, 54 training workshops were held and 1,850 individuals were reached in communities across Ontario through Peer Champion events. In a website survey conducted with program participants, 84% reported an improved understanding of the warning signs of domestic violence and 92% reported that the information and resources provided helped them access information to help their friends and/or clients. Peer Champions also reported engaging with isolated communities and communities where domestic violence is never spoken about, such as young Muslim women in the Toronto area.

**Commented [JB1]:** Request – Could you provide more details about what OCASI is doing with regards to sustainability of the IRCNFF Peer Champions program (i.e., what OCASI is doing so that the program will endure / be sustained)?

## **PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY**

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The IRCNFF Peer Champions Campaign is monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. A range of quantitative and qualitative data is collected through usage statistics and Peer Champion / participant evaluation forms. Peer Champions complete a questionnaire at the start and end of their term, and event participants complete an evaluation form at the end of each event to measure the knowledge gained as a result of the event. The results are compiled and reviewed on an annual basis and program methodology / activities are updated before the start of each term.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants**

<https://ocasi.org>

**IRCNFF Campaign**

<http://www.immigrantandrefugeenff.ca/want-change/about-nff-projects>