

Community Conversation: The Economic & Social Impact of Temporary Foreign Workers

On November 12th, 2020, The Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP) was proud to hold the first Community Conversation on the Economic and Social Impact of Temporary Foreign Workers in Windsor-Essex. The planning of this unique event was informed by a steering committee made up of WE LIP council members, and was the first of what we hope will be many conversations focused on the needs, challenges, outcomes, and successes of our temporary foreign worker population, and all the service providers and community partners that work hard to support them.



The community conversation was supported and co-chaired by Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion and **Windsor-Tecumseh MP, Irek Kusmierczyk**, along with WE LIP's **Community Connector, Michelle Suchiu**. Over the two-and-a-half-hour event, 135 unique participants representing over 70 different stakeholders and service providers, joined the conversation to learn about local community engagement work, hear details about the Migrant Worker Support Network pilot project from British Columbia, and hear from panelists representing Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Employment and Social Development Canada.



"Our conversation here today is contributing to an important national conversation that is taking place in our region of Windsor-Essex. By the sheer scale of our migrant workforce here, and by the scale of the outbreaks that we experienced, we have an incredibly important leadership role to play in what is now a national conversation about temporary foreign workers."

MP, Irek Kusmierczyk,

“We as a community, as a municipality, need to put our arms around everyone who lives here, who works here, who plays here, and that is how we are looking going forward.”

Mayor Hilda MacDonald

On the local front, partners representing the municipalities of Leamington and Kingsville, Migrant Worker Associations, Industry, Economic Development, and Healthcare shared with participants details of the former and current work being done locally in support of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW). The **Mayor of Leamington, Hilda MacDonald**, and the **Mayor of Kingsville, Nelson Santos**, began the conversation by sharing the history of temporary foreign workers in the community (the first workers arriving in 1966) and the growth and changes over time from small family farms with a few migrant workers, to large growers that add 8,000 – 10,000 Temporary Foreign Workers each year to a community of 30,000. Recently, both municipalities have focused their efforts on inclusivity, making their towns more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, establishing recreational programs like baseball and soccer leagues, and opening up activities and resources to the TFW community.



Martin Varela, Chair of the Migrant Worker Community Program (MWCP), and Francy Munoz, Community Legal Worker from the Windsor-Essex Bilingual Legal Clinic and C.A.R.E for

International Workers, shared the details of the work that they and their partners do to support temporary foreign workers, including hosting a Multicultural Day and Festival of Guest Nations, running Bike Safety Clinics, organizing group trips in Ontario, promoting free English language classes, producing general and legal public education videos, and assisting International Workers with legal services of all sorts.



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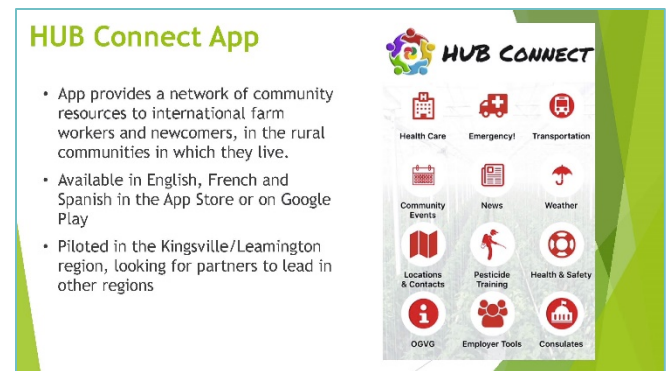
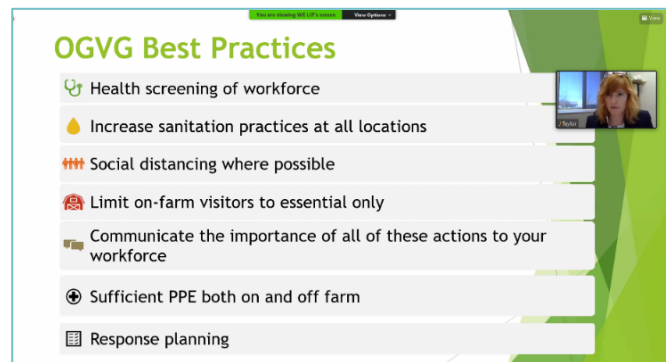


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Dr. Justine Taylor, Science & Government Relations Manager from Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG), shared the details and outcomes of their community engagement initiative, *“Building a Stronger, More Connected Kingsville-Leamington.”* In 2018, OGVG had the first of a series of three community engagement sessions with the goal of bringing together stakeholders in Windsor-Essex (particularly Kingsville & Leamington) to discuss ways to make Kingsville and Leamington a more welcoming community for our TFWs. These engagements brought together over 160 partners and community members together to voice concerns, discuss opportunities, and build a shared understanding of the issues and a vision for the future. One of the many results was the formation of ten different working groups around topics like Healthcare, Transportation, Health and Safety, Economic Impact, etc. These groups engaged in various levels of activity until March when attentions shifted due to COVID-19. As well, OGVG developed the HUB Connect App to help improve communication with TFW in the community, and is currently working with the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) to populate the app and improve uptake.



Marion Fantetti, Business Ombudsman from the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation, shared details of the reengagement of the Economic Impact working group, in partnership with OGVG, Workforce Windsor Essex, and the Migrant Worker Community Program to continue the process of collecting data on the economic and social contributions Temporary Foreign Workers make to the economic and cultural fabric of Windsor-Essex. The work of this group and the data they collect will be used to inform a positive messaging social media campaign in the early part of 2021.

“Our communities are inclusive. We welcome, support, and appreciate the contributions of all residents—international and local. Our success is only possible because each person is supported by the workforce, organizations, and other residents to contribute their diverse gifts to create a thriving community for all.”

OGVG, Building a Stronger, More Connected Kingsville-Leamington

And finally, **Kristin Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer of Erie Shores HealthCare** in Leamington, shared details on how Erie Shores and healthcare partners such as the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network, Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, and Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor Regional Hospital and Hotel Dieu Grace Healthcare have been working together to serve the temporary foreign worker community both pre- and post-COVID. Measures include building up primary care capacity, the development of the Migrant Worker Health Aid Card, coordination on farm testing, utilization of We Speak during COVID-19 assessments, and employing a member of the Migrant Worker Community Program to offer interpretation services on site.

Following the local presentations, we were thrilled to have **Luce Gélinas from Employment and Social Development Canada** join the conversation to share details of the Migrant Worker Support Network, a pilot project out of British Columbia that focuses on addressing TFW protection issues through quarterly multi-stakeholder meetings and a funding program. Community members were very interested in hearing the details, experiences, and outcomes of the pilot program, and Ms. Gélinas, a Manager of Worker Protection Policy and Partnerships on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, was happy to share. ESDC, Ms. Gélinas, and her team, have been very supportive of our community's efforts and open to sharing information and working together toward shared goals.

The conversation was then joined by Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship, and **MP for Hochelaga, Soraya Martinez Ferrada**. Ms. Martinez Ferrada shared some details of the challenges the ministry faced when borders closed down at the beginning of the pandemic. Her office worked closely with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Marie-Claude Bibeau, Global Affairs Canada, and various employers to ensure that the agri-food sector had the workers needed to ensure food security. As well, Ms. Martinez Ferrada sought feedback from the community. As she explained, "I want to discuss the approach and the support that we should be putting into place to allow you to succeed and to allow us to succeed collectively, aligning the immigration with the economic

Why do we need a Migrant Worker Support Network?

- Coordination and consolidation of support services and activities for migrant workers
- Bridge-building between multi-level stakeholders to better support migrant workers
- Grassroots decision-making and worker-informed policies and practices



Examples of funded activities

- Visits on farms
- Resource events such as health fairs, tailored information sessions
- Social events such as dinners, soccer tournaments
- Support and assistance to TFWs needing extra support with accessing basic services (such as health care) and other government programs and services
- Assisting workers who have been abused or at-risk of being abused (open work permit for vulnerable workers, emergency assistance)



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development and labor needs of the communities...[B]ut many of you actually lived these challenges and I appreciate your counsel and your advice on how to move forward.”

In the final portion of the conversation, panelist **Gillian Wan, Director of Integration - Settlement Network for the Ontario Region of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada**, and Ms. Gélinas responded to questions submitted by participants. Chaired by Michelle Suchiu, questions included details of what the two departments were currently doing to support temporary foreign workers, how to gain access to funding, and ESDC’s recent announcement of proposed minimum accommodation requirements for agri-food workers.

Ms. Wan outlined that, while most IRCC funded services are limited to Permanent Residents, the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed them to pilot a project where they use existing resources, such as WE LIP, to support client groups that they have otherwise been unable to serve directly.

Ms. Gélinas elaborated on the Temporary Foreign Workers accommodations consultation and survey that is seeking feedback on proposed federal accommodations requirements, including potential impacts and considerations for transitioning to new requirements. The consultation is open to employers, and workers and worker organizations, and is open until December 22, 2020. A link to details can be found here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/temporary-foreign-worker/consultation-accommodations.html>

Interestingly, while in the past a community conversation such as this would have been held in person, the virtual nature of this event presented a unique opportunity for participants to further engage with speakers, panelists, and one another through Zoom’s chat feature. Throughout the conversation, a healthy dialogue was observed, and more information shared, amongst participants. These dialogues are also an important part of community engagement and will be used to inform future work.



Currently, WE LIP has helped bring together a Workplace Wellness for Agri-Food Workers Task Force, focused on expanding primary care capacity, and expanding the We Speak initiative to community hospitals, emergency services, and primary care clinics that serve TFWs. As well, there is an Economic and Social Impact Task Force whose research will inform a positive messaging social media campaign designed to share with the community at large the importance of TFWs in our community, combat any negative feelings and stereotypes, and to highlight all that TFWs bring both economically and socially to Windsor-Essex. And from these Task Forces, the conversation, and feedback from the community, an action plan for future work will be developed.

As Michelle Suchiu and Irek Kusmierczyk emphasized in their closing remarks, this community conversation is just the beginning of efforts to continue the great work being done in the community. And the level of participation in this first conversation highlights the degree to which Windsor-Essex is interested and engaged in improving supports for temporary foreign workers and bringing them into the fold of settlement and other support services. As Mr. Kusmierczyk states of his work with the Ministry of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, “the foundational principle that guides our work is the philosophy of *‘nothing about us without us’*...and I am heartened to see that in many of the presentations we heard today that this is a fundamental principle that we are abiding by in our daily work...including making sure that temporary foreign workers are part of our conversation, part of our deliberation, part of our action on the ground.”

The unique situation in Windsor-Essex, and the desire of communities like Kingsville, Leamington, and Windsor to be open and inclusive of our temporary foreign workers gives us the opportunity to be a leader for positive change on the national stage and act as models for other communities in Canada.



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