

# Newcomer experiences of housing in **Huron & Perth**

A research study

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 Perth County  
Cultivating Opportunity

A Research Working Group project of the  
Huron County Immigration Partnership

 GODERICH  
Canada's Prettiest Town



 CEL  
THE CENTRE FOR  
Education  
& Learning

 YMCA of  
Southwestern Ontario

 United Way  
Perth-Huron

 FANSHAWE  
Huron-Bruce  
Regional Sites



Huron Perth  
Public Health



Huron County  
Library

 North Perth  
Public Library





# Why study newcomer experiences of housing?

- No fall-back, they don't have family/friends to go back to.
- Lack of credit or rental history
- Understanding experiences of diverse groups allows decision-makers to keep things in mind like development, infill planning
- Representation from different groups is important to break down barriers to enhance people settling in a community
- Lack of knowledge of local rental market or housing support available
- Rural areas often rely on social connection referrals for rentals. Newcomers may not have those networks.
- Newcomers may face housing barriers (xenophobia/racism) that others don't

# Study background

- Finding an affordable place to live was a top challenge for immigrants - 2023 Huron-Perth Immigrant Survey
- Little information available about rural immigrant experiences of housing across Canada
- Housing has significant impact on overall settlement outcomes



# Designed a qualitative study

Dr. Rana Telfah designed & conducted a focus group research project

## Research questions:

- Is housing adequate, accessible, and affordable for immigrant and newcomer families in Huron and Perth counties?
- How is housing information and resources accessed?
- How do housing experiences increase newcomers' feelings of belonging and being part of the community?

# Designed a qualitative study

Organized:

- 4 Focus groups
- In 4 communities
- Goal of 30-50 participants

Developed 13 questions, 1.5 hours each

Questions designed in partnership with  
Research Working Group

# Inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants

Include specifically:

- Newcomers – people who arrived in Canada in 2018 or after
- Live in Huron or Perth
- Live in a community of less than 10,000

# Participants



40 people participated in focus groups

- 17 Listowel
- 10 Goderich
- 8 St. Marys
- 5 Exeter

63% female | 38% male

## Country of origin

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • 15 Ukraine    | • 3 Ghana       |
| • 5 Philippines | • 2 Guatemala   |
| • 5 Mexico      | • 1 Iran        |
| • 4 Syria       | • 1 Russia      |
| • 3 India       | • 1 Ivory Coast |

# Participants



All participants rented

- **23** in houses
- **17** in apartment buildings

31 participants live with children in their home

Year arrived in Canada

- |           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| • 3 2024  | • 1 2019            |
| • 16 2023 | • 1 2018            |
| • 7 2022  | • 1 2017            |
| • 3 2021  | • 4 Didn't disclose |
| • 4 2020  |                     |

# Finding 1: Housing is just one part of settlement experiences

- Entwined with employment & transportation

Other connections impacting housing for newcomers

- English language classes
- Education for children
- Access to health care
- Applicable programs community libraries
- Proximity of grocery stores

# Finding 1: Housing is linked to transportation and employment

“Since I do not drive, I cannot move around easily. After searching, I found a one-bedroom apartment in Goderich that cost \$1,400. As a foreign worker with a limited salary, that is just too much for me. Thankfully, a family offered a room in their home which is much more affordable than the other places in Goderich. While renting in the town itself is expensive, options outside of it are significantly cheaper and more reasonable.” - Goderich participant

## Finding 2: Newcomers face multiple barriers to housing

- 48% paid more than 30% of their monthly income on rent
- Worst impacted are people fleeing war (many pay 40-80% of income) on housing

“60% of my income goes to rent. It varies depending on how many hours I worked in the previous month.”

- Exeter participant

# Finding 2: Newcomers face multiple barriers to housing

Lack of credit history in Canada limits options

- Canadian guarantor required for many rentals, requires newcomers to rely on Canadian contacts

Lengthy wait times after submitting application

- Often wait 2-4 months to find out if application is successful or rejected

Larger families struggle to find a place to rent




# Finding 2: Solution to housing barriers

Shared housing to save money

- Living with roommates allowed 8 participants to allocate only 20-30% of their monthly income to housing

Employers who assist newcomers find a place to live help them reduce stress

## Finding 3: Multiple moves

Movements of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Stayed in the place where they arrived	 10
Moved once	 16
Moved twice or more	 6

## Finding 4: Suitable housing determinants

- ☐ Enough bedrooms
- ☐ Enough bathrooms
- ☐ Place where everyone has privacy
- ☐ People can express themselves freely

## Finding 5:

### Housing conditions vary

- 7 participants lived in houses that were in good condition and renovated
- 4 participants highlighted challenges with older buildings
- Repair requests can meet delays
- Shared laundry can be difficult to access, with equipment in various states of repair

# Finding 6: Landlord-tenant relationships vary

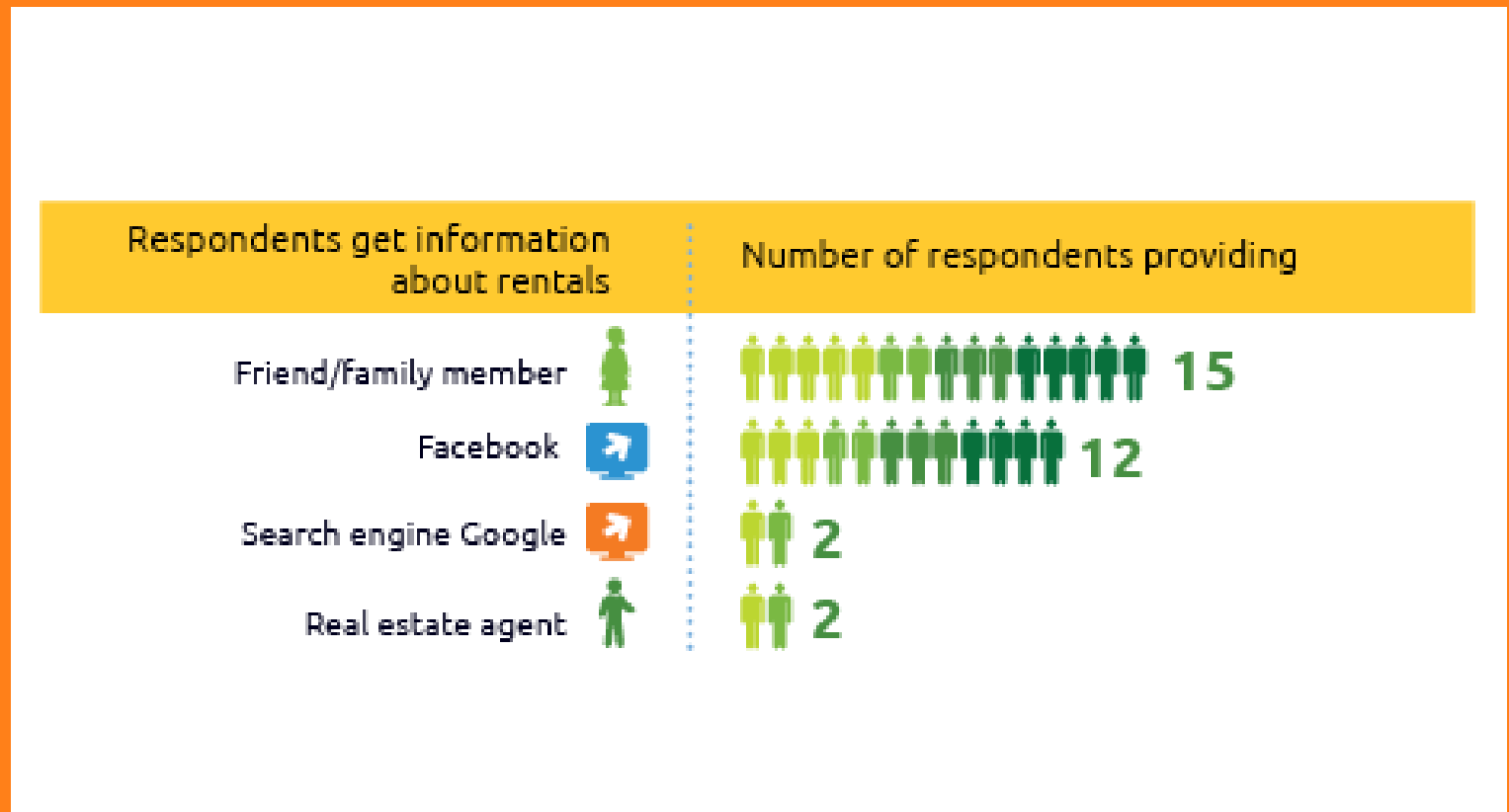
- Responsiveness to requests is considered a hallmark of a good landlord
- Concern about some landlord's views about immigrants

“My husband found a house and he paid the first and the end of the rent. After two days they called my husband and said just you are welcome in there (not me or my child). They said ‘We are not sure you can afford this or manage all of the costs’. So we couldn’t rent the house, even though my husband offered to pay for six months of the rent.”

– Goderich participant

## Finding 7: Finding a place to live – information sources

- In person connections
- Using social media and the internet
- Real estate agents

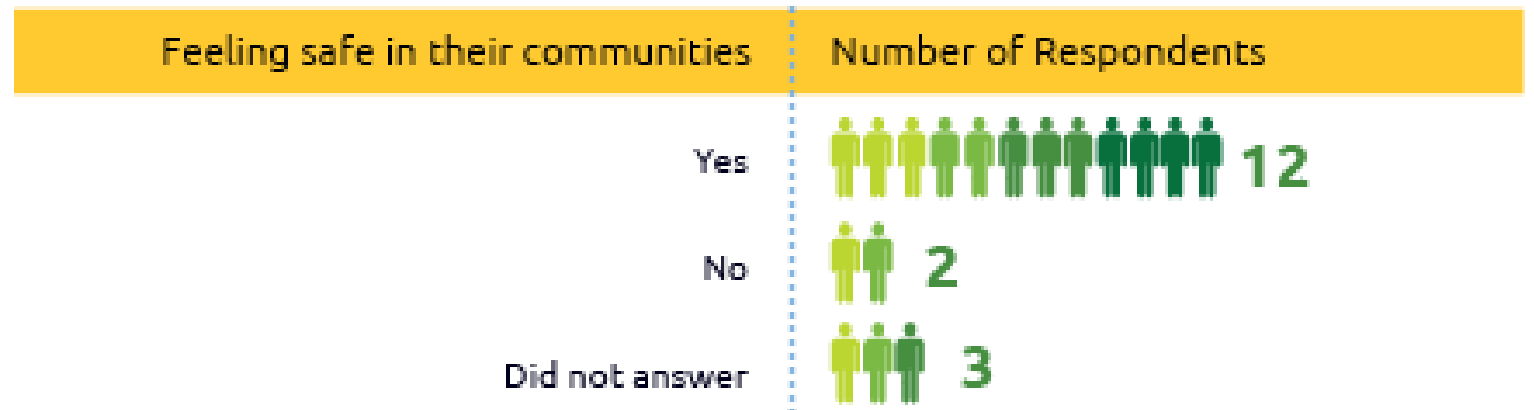


## Finding 7: Finding a place to live – information gaps

- No access of official information sources
- Not familiar with government supports for affordable housing
- Lack of knowledge of tenant rights
- 22 people stated there was **not** enough information about housing in Huron and Perth for newcomers

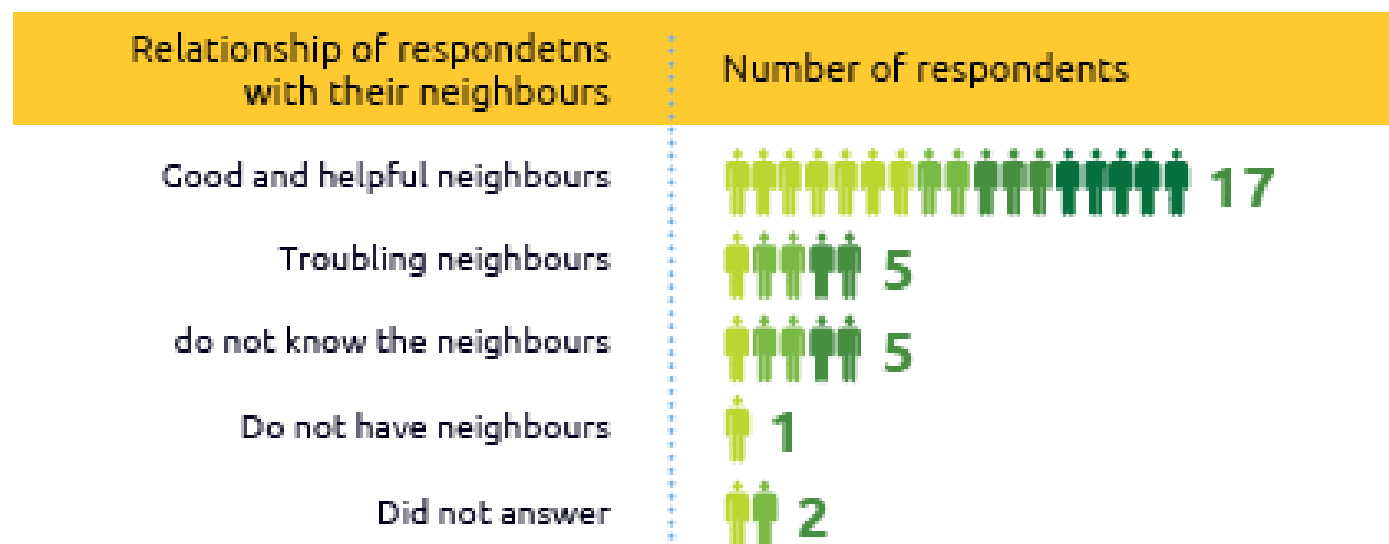
# Finding 8: Newcomers appreciate small communities

- 33 out of 40 felt accepted
- Slower pace, connection to nature, feeling safe appreciated



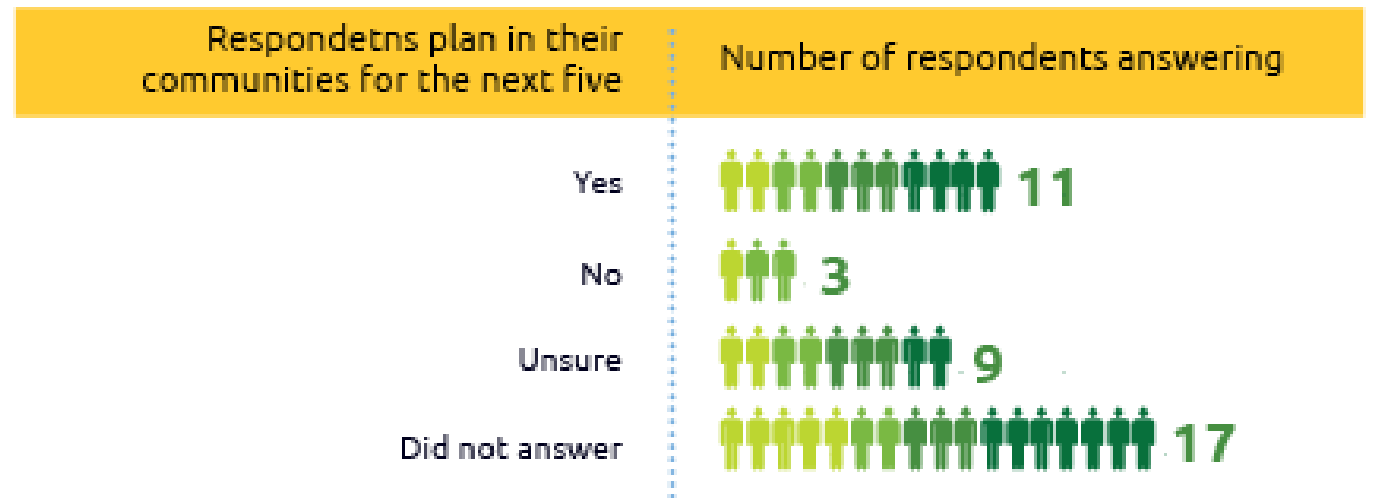
## Finding 9: Newcomers find local residents helpful & friendly

- Described locals as welcoming, generous, empathetic and willing to help by sharing information
- Praised volunteers and neighbours who supported their adjustment to their new surroundings



## Finding 10: People unsure if they will stay

- Housing affordability and proximity to essential services a key deciding factor
- Many who wished to stay hoped to purchase their own home
- Need for permanent residency required
- Limited job options also a factor in people hoping to stay



# Now that we know...

- Organized meetings with immigrant service providers, community organizations and housing focused organizations to identify solutions
- Planning consultations with newcomers to share research findings and identify additional solutions
- Working towards developing a second publication to highlight ways newcomer experiences of housing can be strengthened locally

# Community conversations

- Reviewing the findings
- Sharing experiences
- Brainstorming ideas

Community conversation dates:

- July 22: Goderich library
- August 7: North Perth library, Listowel
- August 13: Exeter library
- St. Marys still being confirmed