

# The City School Mobile Classroom

## Evaluating a Response Method to Improving Access to Education: Final Report (2018-2020)



Alan Bourke, Mike Campbell, Emily Ecker  
& Jim Vanderveken



## A final report by:

Community Access and Engagement ✨ the Department of Liberal Studies  
Mohawk College  
135 Fennell Ave W, J013  
Hamilton, Ontario, L9C 1E9  
Canada  
<https://www.mohawkcollege.ca/community-access-and-engagement>

## Authors:

Alan Bourke  
Emily Ecker  
Jim Vanderveken

## Research Coordinator:

Mike Campbell

Communication about this publication can be directed to:  
Alan Bourke (PhD)  
[alan.bourke@mohawkcollege.ca](mailto:alan.bourke@mohawkcollege.ca)

## Funding:

College Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF), Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

## Acknowledgements:

The authors would like to thank the contributions of the partner organizations involved in the City School Partnership. This report was made possible due to the passion and dedication of the Community Access and Engagement team at Mohawk College. We would like to extend a special thanks to the students and faculty who shared their experiences with us.

October, 2020



# Table of contents

---

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	3
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	4
<b>THE CITY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP</b> .....	5
THE CITY SCHOOL MOBILE: BUILDING PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT .....	6
CONTEXTUALIZING THE CITY SCHOOL MODEL .....	7
CITY SCHOOL COURSE DELIVERIES .....	9
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN</b> .....	9
METHODOLOGY.....	10
INTERVIEW PROCEDURE.....	11
DATA COLLECTION PHASE 1.....	11
DATA COLLECTION PHASE 2.....	12
INTERVIEW ANALYSIS .....	13
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	13
ETHICS PROTOCOL.....	15
<b>FINDINGS</b> .....	15
<b>CITY SCHOOL MOBILE BY THE NUMBERS</b> .....	16
<b>FINDINGS: CENTRE ON BARTON, DUNVILLE, AND CALEDONIA DELIVERIES</b> .....	18
CONNECTING WITH AN EMPLOYMENT PATHWAY.....	18
TACTILE LEARNING EXPERIENCE.....	19
CLASSROOM DYNAMICS .....	19
WRAPAROUND SUPPORT.....	20
PATHWAYS MOMENTUM .....	20
<b>FINDINGS: THE IMMIGRANT WORKING CENTRE DELIVERIES</b> .....	21
PARTNERSHIP SYNERGY .....	22
ACCULTURATING TO WORKPLACE NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS .....	23
CONNECTING TO AN EMPLOYMENT PATHWAY .....	23
BUILDING SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS .....	24
<b>REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	25
<b>CONCLUSION: ASSESSING THE MOBILE DELIVERY MODEL</b> .....	30
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	32

# Executive summary

When Mohawk College launched its City School initiative in 2015 with a single 15-seat classroom embedded within a neighbourhood community centre, the response from residents was immensely encouraging, and yet, at the same time, profoundly revealing. It was encouraging because residents spoke of the opportunity to contemplate a better future for themselves and their children. It was revealing because the college team gained invaluable insights from participating students about their learning preferences and the social and environmental factors that supported their academic success. These important early lessons still inform City School practices today.

Mohawk College has adopted an agile delivery strategy using various modalities, from place-based, virtual and remote, to tactile and part-time, to intensive short-duration and weekend programming, in order to meet the diverse learning needs of students. This study examines mobile classrooms as a mechanism to further the reach of City School within the community, evaluating their effectiveness in attracting, engaging, and supporting learners from marginalized communities in short-duration, skill-based training activities that connect them to an employment pathway.

The results of the study speak to the direct benefits that participants derive relative to new skill acquisition and improved employment competitiveness, as well as to the implications for building collective capacity within the community network. Among the eight recommendations articulated, the study also suggests that skilled trades programming delivered using mobile classrooms, whether due to their community proximity or the accessible nature of the programming, has the potential to attract a learner cohort with significant participation from underrepresented groups, such as low-income adult learners, women, Indigenous individuals, and newcomers to Canada.

Over the past five years, City School has never lost sight of the fundamental tenets that root its success: the importance of trust, and the value of nurturing the interconnections and interdependencies that help underpin the partnership forged with the community and the City of Hamilton. The resident voice continues to inspire and motivate the growth of City School in reaching new audiences through improved design and delivery strategies. This study reinforces the value of the City School model, offering a compelling attestation of mobile classrooms as an effective medium by which to attract a diversity of learners, to operate as an effective poverty-reduction strategy, and as a means to strengthen the bond that exists between Mohawk College and the community.

# Introduction

---

In this report, we present the results of our SSHRC-funded study *The City School Mobile Classroom: Evaluating a Response Method to Improving Access to Education (2018-2020)*. The purpose of the research was to follow two years of City School mobile classroom course delivery and explore the efficacy of the model in reducing barriers to postsecondary and/or employment.

The mobile classroom represents an expansion of the reach and scope of the programming offered through City school's neighbourhood-based classroom locations. The mobile classroom is a 53-foot trailer unit that expands to provide a 1000-square-foot classroom that provides tuition-free, skills-based training in areas of welding, electrical, plumbing, and construction. The aim of the mobile is to further reduce the educational disparities associated with poverty and to connect participants with postsecondary and/or employment opportunities in areas of the skilled trades. The first mobile classroom unit (the operations of which are the focus of this report) was launched in 2017 with the assistance of \$1.6 million in funding from the province of Ontario. A second mobile unit was launched in 2020 with the support of the Government of Canada. During the research project, the mobile classroom has been placed in three urban locations (at the Centre on Barton, on Rebecca St., adjacent to the Immigrants Working Centre, and Main St. West), and two rural-based locations (in the townships of Dunnville and Caledonia). Our research objectives included:

1. Data collection on student registration, enrollment, and course completion rates.
2. Analyze the individual-level impact of participation in mobile courses and their efficacy in reducing barriers to postsecondary and/or employment through the provision of skills-based training programs.
3. Explore the potential to strengthen the linkages between employers and residents from underserved communities, in both urban and rural communities.
4. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mobile delivery model in connecting students with postsecondary and/or employment opportunities.
5. Explore the potential for the replication of the mobile classroom model in municipalities elsewhere in Ontario and Canada.

Researching these objectives has deepened the understanding we have of the impact of the mobile on individuals and participating organizations, has contributed to an evidence base that will allow us to expand the reach of the model, and has provided us with an opportunity to share what we have learned with educators, employers, and policy-makers.

The report builds upon research previously conducted into Mohawk College's neighbourhood-based City School model as documented in the previous SSHRC-funded project *The City School Partnership: A Community-Built Response to Improving Access to Education (2016-2019)*. Exploring the interplay of individual and structural barriers, this research deepened the understanding we have of the multidimensional nature of the barriers that residents face in accessing postsecondary, and on the benefits of the neighbourhood-based delivery model (Bourke et al, 2019a; Bourke et al, 2019b). Furthermore, a recent report on the economic impact of City School indicates the efficacy of the initiative in raising the postsecondary aspirations of the city's low-income residents, as well as its promise in addressing the skills shortages identified by employers (Deloitte, 2020). Above all, our research illustrates how City School has become an integral part of discussions on poverty and precarious labour in the City of Hamilton.

In what follows, we address the background rationale and scope of the research, describe our research design, and present an analysis of our findings. We conclude with some recommendations for future research and practice.

## The City School Partnership



Mohawk College has made increasing postsecondary access for underserved communities a central pillar of its institutional plan, as detailed in the College's Strategic Plan (2016-2021). City School programming and stakeholder engagement is managed by a dedicated team based in the College's Centre for Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning (CCPEL). Central to the workings of City School is a community-engaged, multi-sectoral collaboration between Mohawk College and partner organizations. The partnership was formed in response to low levels of postsecondary participation and educational attainment in Hamilton's low-income



neighbourhoods. Previous research documents how the city's low-income communities experience higher rates of social assistance and lower rates of parental educational attainment levels than the municipal average, with high-school dropout rates that are close to double the municipal average (Mayo et al., 2012; Mayo, 2012; Buist, 2019).

By bringing the college classroom into the community, the overarching aim of the partnership is to boost levels of postsecondary participation in the City's low-income neighbourhoods and serve as a catalyst for further growth. Key to the development of City School has been the ongoing involvement and contribution of the City of Hamilton and our community partners. In particular, the Health and Safe Communities department of the City of Hamilton has been an active partner throughout the process with regard to informing and advising on program design and delivery, assisting as a valuable source of referrals and wraparound support, and serving as a crucial point of connection between the college and the community. Working in collaboration with the City's Neighbourhood Development poverty reduction strategy, the success achieved by City School to date is attributable to the strength of the partnership. Currently, City School has connections with over 100 employer partners and approximately 28 service providers. Although the partnership continues to evolve as new partners are brought to the table, partners involved in the design and delivery of mobile classroom courses include:

- Mohawk College
- Immigrants Working Centre (IWC)
- St. Leonard's Community Services
- City of Hamilton
- Industry-Education Council of Hamilton
- Ontario Works
- Haldimand County

The College's commitment to growing City School also aligns with Challenge 2025, an ambitious five-year strategy targeting poverty, labour shortages, underemployment and unemployment, and a lack of accessible education in the Greater Hamilton Area (GHA). Building upon a collaborative model of community and employer engagement, the long-term goal of Challenge 2025 is to foster innovation, economic development, and community engagement by creating a scalable and transformative demand-led workforce development model in the City of Hamilton.

## **The City School mobile: Building pathways to education and employment**

The City School mobile classroom is an evidence-based response to community and industry needs, and the changing nature of the employment landscape. There is growing concern in

Ontario, as in other provinces, regarding the skills mismatch between employers and job seekers, and regarding the challenges employers face in terms of employee recruitment and retention (Holmes & Hjartarson, 2014, Human Resources Professionals Association, 2014; MacMillan & Young, 2015; Sullivan, 2017; Weerakoon & MacDonald, 2018; Workforce Planning Hamilton, 2019). Despite the fact that apprenticeship opportunities in the Hamilton region have been increasing (Immigrant Working Centre, 2018), the province of Ontario is estimated to lose up to 86,000 workers this decade due to retirement (Buildforce Canada, 2017).

Although acquiring a postsecondary education continues to be a strong predictor of future earning power and social mobility (Boothby & Drewes, 2006; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013, Jepsen et al., 2014), skills are increasingly seen to be a better predictor of employment and wage growth than either occupation or level of education (Human Resources Professionals Association, 2014). These include such soft skill competencies as employee work ethic, interpersonal skills, and dependability, in addition to technical and industry-specific hard skills. Furthermore, employers are increasingly pursuing the option of drawing more people from the margins into the workforce, with more than one third of employers exhibiting flexibility regarding level of education and experience (Manpower Group, 2018).

A recommendation from previous research was to bring the college classroom to the community (Wingard, 2014). Currently, there are four downtown classroom locations (Eva Rothwell Centre; Hamilton Public Library; Central Branch; Mission Services of Hamilton, Community Services location; and Thrive Group, Idlewyld Manor long-term care home), plus several traditional pop-up classrooms. The City School mobile extends this strategy to hands-on learning utilizing the college classroom in the community model, with the same intention of mitigating the barriers to education and/or employment that vulnerable populations face. In effect, the mobile nature of the classroom allows the College to expand its reach in connecting with vulnerable populations directly in their communities. In doing so, the model forms an innovative alignment with a call from the province of Ontario to develop “community-hubs” to localize the delivery of social services and needs, including the provision of educational and employment opportunities (Pitre, 2008). To this end, research indicates that initiatives focused on boosting postsecondary access be premised on the following best practice strategies: that they provide comprehensive wraparound support to help participants overcome their barriers, and that they provide a robust training program that includes teaching both hard (e.g., technical) and soft (e.g., interpersonal communication) skills (Loewen et al., 2015).

## **Contextualizing the City School mobile**

There are several mobile classroom initiatives in Canada that serve as useful points of comparison with the City School mobile. The Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) offers hands-on skills



training through NAIT in Motion (NIM), a 53 feet-long mobile unit that focuses on delivering trades training to Indigenous communities in rural areas. Red River's Mobile Training Labs (MTL) are two 53-foot long units that deliver skills-based training over a five-month program of study to Indigenous students in northern communities in Manitoba. The MTLs also offer interactive events designed to foster a positive image of postsecondary education through their "Try-a-Trade" initiative aimed at grade K to grade 12 students. Other initiatives include North West Community College's (NWCC) Trade Routes initiative (delivering trades training to women, youth, and Indigenous peoples in sectors specializing in fields of oil and gas, mining, and construction) and Labourers' International Union of North America's (Local 607) mobile unit offering postsecondary experiences to people seeking apprenticeships in the skilled trades in Northern Ontario. All these initiatives are rural-based with a specialization in delivering educational experiences in remote Indigenous communities.

The City School mobile is the first of its kind in Canada to be deployed in a specifically (although not exclusively) urban setting. By providing tuition-free courses through a fully-equipped classroom unit, the mobile is able to offset many of the limitations of a traditional "bricks-and-mortar" setting (e.g., being confined to one neighbourhood, and having to equip a classroom that may see limited course deliveries). In the unique case of the deliveries conducted in partnership with specific organizations (as detailed below in relation to the partnership between the College and the Immigrants Working Centre), the placement of the mobile in close proximity to their premises allows for improved service delivery to their client populations through the provision of wraparound supports that the College has limited capacity to provide (e.g., support specific to their organizational mandate). Furthermore, the mobile model has the flexibility of being able to relocate to rural areas as the need arises, as in the case of the program deliveries in Haldimand County. The launch of a second City School mobile unit in 2020 has strengthened the capacity of the College to engage with diverse community needs and with greater geographical reach, in addition to further promoting the postsecondary and employment pathways available through the College.



## City School course deliveries

Courses delivered through the mobile classroom are at an introductory level and focus predominantly on areas of construction and welding. Construction courses introduce the basics of plumbing, carpentry, and electricals, and encourage students to pursue a career in the skilled trades and/ or enhance their home improvement skills. Students who successfully complete the course received a credit towards a full-time or continuing education course. Welding courses introduce students to hands-on skills and the theory of welding. Students who completed this course receive a course exemption from the Manufacturing Engineering Technician and Quality Engineering Technician programs at Mohawk College. Courses (some of which ran for 12 weeks) are delivered in modular format and, depending on the specific course, variously involve credit or non-credit modules. Credit modules draw upon aspects of the following courses delivered



through the College: Mechanical Maintenance, Construction and Renovation, and Introduction to Millwright. Non-credit modules drew upon aspects of the following courses: Pneumatic Skills, Shop Skills for Manufacturing, Hydraulic Systems, Welding Intensive, and Welding Practicum.

## Research design

A mixed-methods research design was used in conducting the research. Research data collection methods focused on the following areas:

- *Literature reviews* on topics relevant to the research (e.g., barriers to postsecondary, skills shortages in Ontario, employment pathways, and barriers to employment for newcomers).

- *Policy reviews* of postsecondary access and engagement initiatives, including mobile course deliveries, in Canada.
- Compilation and analysis of *program data* pertaining to mobile course registration, enrollment, and course completion (and associated data provided by partners).
- *Semi-structured interviews* with City School mobile classroom students and instructors.
- *Classroom visits*: Frequent visits to classroom locations were conducted by the research coordinator to introduce the research agenda to participating students, recruit interview participants, and observe the classroom environment.

Ten students were recruited from the Social Service Worker program to work as student research assistants (SRAs) on the project and received training and mentoring by the lead researcher in community-engaged methodologies and research design. The SRAs were involved in conducting literature reviews, interview transcription, analysis of interview data, and reviews of policy documents.

## Methodology

Methodologically, we drew upon the principles of community engagement in conducting research that is collaborative and responsive to community needs (Mosher et al., 2014). This approach involves postsecondary institutions forming collaborative partnerships with community partners in order to generate "mutually beneficial and socially responsive knowledge, leading to enhanced economic, social and cultural developments" (Peacock, 2013, p. 311). Dempsey defines campus-community engagements as demonstrating a commitment to "collaborative forms of organizing and typically involve under-resourced and marginalized communities" (2010, p. 360). Crucial to achieving this is the foregrounding of the perspectives of community partners and the utilization of existing infrastructure and institutional capacity. We also drew upon Kania and Kramer's (2011) model of "collective impact" in conducting the research. Anchored by a "backbone" partner (e.g., Mohawk College), the power of collective impact stems from the multi-sectoral coordination of "differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action" (Hanley-Brown et al., 2012, p. 6). Working to achieve our research goals has involved maintaining ongoing channels of communication with our community partners to ensure that the research remains responsive to community and partner needs.

## Interview procedure

The research process was conducted in two overlapping phases.

### Data collection phase 1

The first phase focused on courses delivered to newcomer populations (specifically, refugee claimants) in partnership with the Immigrants Working Centre (IWC) in downtown Hamilton (Rebecca St. location). The IWC provides a wide range of support to newcomer populations, including employment/ welfare assistance, basic computer training, ESL assistance, driving test preparation, and assistance related to trades certification. The IWC developed an employment program called TradesLink that is open to newcomers and refugee populations. Tradeslink was funded by \$570,000 from the then-titled Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (subsequently relaunched as the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Service) and was tasked with training 180 newcomers and provided their clients with training, certification, and connections to the labour market in manufacturing and construction. As part of the partnership, the College provided the training and certification component of this program through City School course delivery. Graduates of the program strengthened their job-readiness, obtained a Mohawk College course credit (depending on the course), finished with enhanced employment standards training and job-specific certifications, and were able to avail of personalized interview preparation through the IWC (IWC, 2018).

From fall 2019 to winter 2020, courses were delivered to 72 students across seven course deliveries. These students, all of whom were seeking protected-person status in Canada, included eight women and 64 men. Participants had an average age of 41 and represented 22 different nationalities. 48 students were enrolled in Introduction to Construction (four deliveries), and 30 students in Introduction to Welding (three deliveries). Six students took both, with four students completing both courses. Students traveled to the classroom location from across the city. Courses ran for seven weeks with an average of 10 students per delivery. Classes have a maximum capacity of 12 students, primarily due to the availability of mobile workstations. Courses had a completion rate of 90%, although it should be noted that student participation was required as a precondition of the provision of settlement services and in order to keep receiving government funding.

Following course completion, 28 interviews were conducted with students drawn from across the seven course deliveries. All interviews were conducted in English by the research coordinator. This sample represented approximately 39% of all enrolled students. Participants identified as having arrived from Africa or South America, but also included individuals from Central America, Asia, and the Middle East. There was significant diversity in terms of the

educational background and experiences of students. In terms of the average level of education, 19% had completed high school in their home country, and 60% had some level of postsecondary education (see Fig. 1). The occupational background of interviews was similarly varied, and included experience of working in banking and finance, restaurant/ food services, computer engineering, construction, public administration, human resources, office administration, and teaching.

Fig. 1 Level of education of IWC students

<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Students (72)</b>	<b>Percentage (100)</b>
Not completed high school	8	11
Completed high school	14	19
Some PSE	10	14
Completed PSE	40	56

## Data collection phase 2

The second phase of data collection was focused on the mobile deliveries to residents in downtown Hamilton (Centre on Barton location) and in the rural areas of Dunnville (population 12,000) and Caledonia (population 9,674). Courses were delivered to a total of 63 students across 11 deliveries. Enrolled students included 15 women and 48 men. The course deliveries in Dunnville and Caledonia were the result of City School’s partnership and expansion into Haldimand County and were informed by a combination of feedback from Haldimand County Economic Development and City School mandate objectives. Partners in the Haldimand County municipal office identified both townships as their preferred locations and assisted in identifying sites for mobile placement.

Following course completion, a representative sample of 15 interviews were conducted with students in winter 2020, with all interviews conducted by the research coordinator in the mobile classroom. Participants included seven women and eight men, with an average age of 34 (ages ranged overall from 19 to 53). One respondent was Indigenous, five identified as Black, and nine as White. Students typically travelled to the classroom either on foot, by bicycle, by bus, or by personal vehicle, including some carpooling (it should be noted that access to public transit can be more challenging in rural and outlying areas). Five respondents were in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) assistance at the time of interview (with OW serving a point of referral to City School). In terms of the level of education of interviewed students, three had not fully high-school education, seven had completed high-school, three had previously attempted some form of postsecondary education, and two had completed a postsecondary course of study.

The previous employment experience of students was quite varied, ranging from construction, bus-driving retail, various forms of contract work, and (in the case of one individual) some experience with an online business. All participants had fragmented employment histories with periods of unemployment or underemployment. Consistent with previous research findings, students experienced a wide range of situational and individual challenges, ranging from financial barriers, negative self-perceptions regarding their age (as previously mentioned, students had an average age of 41), childcare responsibilities (including special needs), a lack of personal transportation, and mental health challenges.

## Interview analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using a process of thematic analysis, a method used to identify, analyze, and discuss patterns and themes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Unlike more inductive forms of data analysis, thematic analysis adopts a deductively-derived approach in providing less of a rich description of the overall dataset, instead focusing on selected aspects of the data as guided by the key ideas or objectives informing the research.

## Methodological considerations

Our research presented several methodological considerations. Throughout the report, we use the term "underserved" or "vulnerable" populations and/or communities to describe targeted student cohorts and have purposively avoided describing students as "at-risk" or "marginalized". Our usage of this term is intended broadly due to the heterogeneous composition of enrolled students and the diversity of the barriers and challenges they face in accessing postsecondary and/or employment opportunities. A challenge in building the City School model and in expanding programming lies in responding to such diversity by delivering a variety of programming options and wraparound support.

A specific set of challenges arose regarding the course deliveries to refugee claimants<sup>1</sup>. The barriers that refugee claimants face when seeking to transition to either education or employment are complex and varied, ranging from the highly legalistic and uncertain nature of

---

<sup>1</sup> As a signature to the United Nations Convention of Refugees Act of 1951 and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967, Canada accepts two streams of refugees: those who are resettled from overseas (Conventional Refugees (CR)) and inland protection (Refugee Claimants (RC), habitually referred to as "asylum seekers" in the literature). The former are processed through the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, and the latter through the In-Canada Asylum Program (Korntheur et al., 2017). Canada receives approximately 0.3% of the world's refugee population, the vast majority of whom (both conventional and claimant) settle in the province of Ontario (Reynolds & Hyndman, 2015).



the refugee claimant process, a lack of competency in either official language, and a lack of documentation pertaining to previous education or employment history and qualifications (Yu, Ouellet, & Warmington, 2017)<sup>2</sup>. Compounding these barriers are a range of socio-emotional challenges that often exacerbate the vulnerable arrival circumstances of refugees, encompassing possible migration-related trauma, the effect of limited economic resources, mental health issues, limited social networks, and missing family members (Cleveland & Rousseau, 2013; Shawyer et al., 2017; Turrini et al., 2017; Kronick, 2018). In addition, refugee claimants typically face several institutional/ systemic challenges, including barriers that limit their access to education and employment and access to social services and housing (Hynie, 2018).

In accordance with our ethical commitment toward interviewee confidentiality, and mindful that participants may be reluctant to share details of their pre-migration experiences with us in light of their precarious status, students were not asked why they had travelled to Canada to seek asylum, or why they did not seek to do so in the countries they may have passed through before arrival. However, the literature on the background and experiences of refugee claimants/ asylum seekers, both in Canada and elsewhere, details how many such individuals typically experience a complex array of risk and/or protective factors (Hyndman, 2011). Many have benefitted from supportive families and previous access to educational and/or employment in their home countries, whereas others have experienced a lack of family/ community support, compounded by experience of displacement, trauma, violence, and resource deprivation (Li et al., 2016; Friesen & Sherrell, 2018; Hynie, 2018). In sum, the data obtained through interviews with the refugee claimant students involved in the TradesLink program should be considered in light of their precarious status in Canada, and with respect to the diversity of their backgrounds and circumstances.

A limitation of our research arose with regard to the language barrier, as all interviews with students who were refugee claimants at the time were conducted in English. This presented an interpretative challenge regarding our reading and analysis of the interview data, particularly in the case of interviews conducted with students with especially low levels of proficiency in English. In addition, we are cognisant that respondents may speak differently to persons they view as “the same” compared with persons they view as “the other” (Sprague, 2005). In other words, we are mindful of how our identity as Anglophone researchers based in a postsecondary

---

<sup>2</sup> Finalizing a credibility determination regarding the perceiving legitimacy of a refugee’s claim to asylum remains a difficult, lengthy, and often poorly understood process (Rehagg, 2017), with the amount of time a claimant may wait to be processed varying considerably over the years. Claimants typically experience differing timelines depending on if they are categorized as an individual from a Designated Country of Origin (DCO). In essence, the course was an opportunity for students to learn some new skills while waiting for their case to be adjudicated and in anticipation of a successful outcome.

institution, and the power relations that these characteristics may embody, may well have positioned us as representative of the system that respondents were working to negotiate.

## Ethics protocol

All interviews, interviewee recruitment protocols, and consent forms received ethical clearance before the commencement of the research. Prior to engaging in research, all members of the research team completed the TCPS 2 Tutorial Course on Research Ethics (CORE) available through the website of Canada's Tri-Council funding agencies (composed of The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC))

## Findings

---

The presentation of our findings is organized as follows. First, we present the statistical data on course registration, enrolment, and graduation. Due to the nature of course deliveries, locations, and participating students, findings from our interview data are presented in two sections (although there is some degree of thematic overlap between each). The first section presents data gathered from the mobile deliveries to residents at the Centre on Barton, Dunnville, Caledonia, and Main St. West mobile locations. The second section presents data gathered from programming delivered in partnership with the Immigrants Working Centre (IWC) at the Rebecca St. location in downtown Hamilton. This division is warranted due to the differences that exist between these cohorts. For example, since the inception of City School, 68% of enrolled students have resided in the City's low-income downtown neighbourhoods, with 51% of locals having a high-school education or less. By way of contrast, students connected to the IWC deliveries are newcomers to the city (specifically, refugee claimants), with approximately 60% having some form of postsecondary experience. As previously addressed, differences in occupational background are similarly varied, with students who were also refugee claimants more likely to have had previous careers. Evaluation of the mobile nature of the classroom, the *raison d'être* of the research project, is addressed in a concluding section of the report.

## City School mobile by the numbers

Table 2 below provides an overview of mobile course completion statistics by location, semester, and gender breakdown. A total of 145 students enrolled in a City School mobile course across 20

deliveries, with an overall average completion rate of 89%. Men composed 83% of all students, and women 17%.

Table 2 Course registration, enrolment, and completion rates (Fall 2017-Winter 2020)

Location	Semester	Course	Registration*	Enrolment	Completed
Centre on Barton	F2017	Intro to Welding	9	9	7 (77.78%)
Centre on Barton	F2017	Intro to Welding	13	8	7 (87.5%)
Centre on Barton	F2017	Intro to Welding	9	8	4 (50%)
Centre on Barton	W2018	Intro to Welding	9	4	4 (100%)
Centre on Barton	W2018	Intro to Construction	13	4	3 (75%)
Centre on Barton	S2018	Intro to Construction	12	5	5 (100%)
Dunnville	S2018	Intro to Construction	12	9	9 (100%)
Dunnville	S2018	Intro to Construction	7	2	2 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	F2018	Intro to Construction	17	14	14 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	F2018	Intro to Construction	13	10	10 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	F2018	Intro to Welding	12	11	11 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	F2018	Intro to Welding	12	10	10 (90%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	W2019	Intro to Construction	12	12	12 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	W2019	Intro to Welding	13	13	13 (100%)
IWC (Rebecca St.)	W2019	Intro to Welding	11	9	8 (88.89%)
IWC (Rebecca St.) **	S2019	Intro to Welding	6	6	4 (66.67%)
Caledonia (START)	S2019	Mechanical Maintenance	17	5	4 (80%)
Centre on Barton	F2019	Construction and Reno (START)	12	12	9 (75%)
Centre on Barton	F2019	Construction and Reno (START)	11	11	9 (81.82%)
Main St. West	W2020	Intro to Construction to (START)	9	8	4 (50%)
<b>Total completion rate</b>					<b>89%</b>

\*A registered student is one who has signed up for the course without necessarily attending. An enrolled student has come to the second class.

\*\* This course delivery was not part of the IWC partnership.

Table 3 Total course completion by location, semester, and gender

Location	Semester	Male completed	Female completed
Centre on Barton	2017 (Fall) to Winter (2018)	23	7
Dunnville	2018 (Summer)	9	2
IWC (Rebecca St.)	2018 (Fall) to Winter (2019)	70	8
IWC (non-Tradeslink)	2019 (Winter)	3	1
Caledonia	2019 (Summer)	3	1
Centre on Barton	2019 (Fall)	13	5
Main St. West	2020 (Winter)	3	1
<b>Total (&amp; percentage of total)</b>		<b>124</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall course completion rate</b>			<b>(89%)</b>

The interviews strengthened several findings reported in previous research and so will not be discussed in detail in this report. For example, students commented on the confidence-boosting effects of the course experience, how the course was perceived as a risk-free opportunity to sample a college-level course without any financial commitment on their part, and how participation enhanced their skill set. The research also supported previous findings regarding the complex interplay of situational and individual barriers that students faced, and the effect of these on motivation and postsecondary aspirations (Bourke et al., 2019a, 2019b). Interviewed students had heard about City School in many ways, including through Ontario Works, through friends or relatives, from walking by the mobile, to posted adverts.

“Industry is changing and people are retiring or what not, and the demographics [are] changing.... I (now) know that I have options, more options than I thought. I didn’t know these were available and so readily available”  
(Student Interview 5)

# Findings: Centre on Barton, Dunnville, and Caledonia course deliveries

## Connecting with an employment pathway

For most students, the main reason for enrolling in a City school course was to connect with either a postsecondary or (mainly) employment pathway, or in order to explore a new career trajectory. A common theme in interviews was that students were more interested in seeking a pathway to meaningful employment that did not necessarily involve committing to a full-time program of study at the college level. This seemed partly due to the hands-on, skills-based nature of the course and the intention to connect with an entry-level employment opportunity, in addition to financial constraints. Although only alluded to in interviews, there was a perception among some students that the risk associated with taking on a student loan they may later potentially have difficulty repaying, or enrolling in a program of study they felt may not translate into meaningful employment, was not one they were comfortable taking.

Students were greatly appreciative of any opportunities to connect directly with employers and/ or information regarding (for example) embarking on an apprenticeship opportunity (although age was a concern for some older students). For most students, establishing such connection, and the possibility of

eventually transitioning to an employment opportunity, was a key source of their attraction to, and appreciation of, City School. Although the opportunity to conduct follow-up research with students was limited due to the duration of project funding and challenges involved in maintaining contact with students following course completion, the contact we did have with former students was promising. For example, one former student was working as a sub-contractor six

*“I think it was very well received. A lot of people were taking information down about where to look for potential employment. Sounds like everybody wants to go into the industry someplace (...) I thought it was all good, and the support services with Mohawk College was... It's nice to know that is out there and that we now have a student number” (Student Interview 14)*

*“It's been amazing. I learned a lot more than I thought.... I thought it would be way more surface [level] Even just the experience to use those tools, because if you haven't been in the industry, you don't have a chance to. No one has those on hand at home” (Student Interview 5)*

months after course completion and spoke to how he felt that the experience enhanced his skill set and how the City School certification provided proof of this to his employer, whereas another former student found employment with Arcelor Dofasco.

## Tactile learning experience

Most respondents indicated a preference for hands-on training and were greatly appreciative of the opportunity to use equipment and tools they would otherwise not normally have access to as part of their learning. All students reported having learned far more in the course than they thought they would and had high praise for both the quality of the program and instruction received. Several interviewees testified to how the tactile, hands-on nature of the course raised their aspirational horizons and shifted their mindset. Key to achieving this was the role played by instructors sensitized to the needs of their students (as documented in previous research, see e.g., Bourke et al, 2020).



## Classroom dynamics

Interpersonal conflict among students seemed more pronounced in the mobile classroom than the neighbourhood-based City School deliveries, and our analysis of the interview data suggests mixed awareness of the importance of soft skills among participants. A number of interviewees commented on the competitive nature of some of their fellow (particularly male) students, an element compounded by the occasional limited availability of tools (such as drills), a factor that seemed to be a particular point of frustration for some (it should be noted, however, that the limited availability of tools was due to having one instructor fully trained in their usage, and so as to more easily adhere to classroom safety protocols). Several respondents commented on the tendency of some male students to exhibit chauvinistic behaviour towards female students, with this typically manifested in the form of unwelcome attempts at explaining how to use tools. Several interviewees also remarked on the occasionally disrespectful attitude directed toward the instructor. Such views highlight the

*“I was actually really surprised. I’d never been in a college mobile classroom before. Walking in there, it was just mind-boggling, seeing all the work that was put into it and everything, all the stations around us for work and all the computers set up for us and everything. It was like walking into a classroom (on the) first day of school. It got me excited.” (Student Interview 7)*



*“What I saw in this whole thing was Mohawk College's willingness to invest in the student. That was my biggest take-away. Seeing what they were willing to do to give somebody who has no information” (Student Interview 9)*

necessity of continuing to encourage students to reflect on the importance of soft skills (such as the importance of respectful communication, and patience in problem-solving, for instance), in collaborative working environments, particularly for courses with more direct links to employment opportunities. The importance of soft skills in the work environment is supported by recent employer-focused research (Weerakoon & MacDonald, 2018).

## Wraparound support

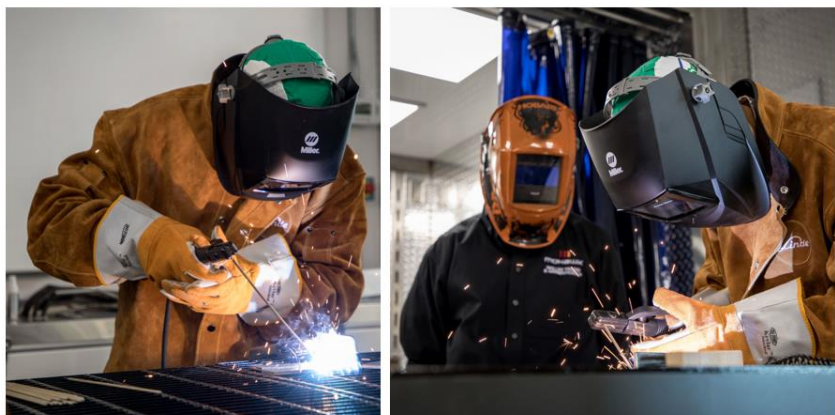
Although previous City School research recommended that representatives of various departments in the College (i.e., admissions, etc.) visit the classroom to provide students with additional information on postsecondary pathways, several students commented on being somewhat overwhelmed by the volume of guest speakers and recommended having a "contact" College webpage that centralizes guest speaker and/ or department contact information. For the most part, however, students were greatly appreciative of the information they received from guest speakers and class visits, and the provision of College wraparound support continues to be a valuable component of the operations of City School.

## Pathway momentum

A final and summative theme is that course participation motivates students to pursue either a postsecondary or employment pathway. Some students embark immediately on such a pathway, whereas for students facing a more complex array of barriers, their experience in the course plants a seed that will later potentially bear fruit. Such momentum is best exemplified by quotes found in the interview data. Such data (along with findings from previous research) suggests that City School can be a profoundly transformative experience for students, both in terms of their personal growth and the shift in mindset it engenders, as well as how it inspires them to pursue a postsecondary

*This [program] connects you with Mohawk which will give you so many more resources to further your life, to better your life for everyone around you and yourself. That is, I think, what people need to do a little bit more with it. People just aren't quite utilizing it as much as they could, but I think the program itself is giving as many resources as they can with regards to that. (Student Interview 6)*

and/or employment pathway. This is not to discount the importance of addressing the structural barriers that contextualize and circumscribe the agency of students (e.g., poverty, discrimination, a lack of accessible education, precarious working conditions, a lack of affordable childcare, etc.), as well as the yet to be determined long-term consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.



*“I came out of it with more than I’ve come out of my job in five years so it was just something that I definitely needed at this point of my life [...] These are things that I’ve come out with that I had way more knowledge than I had before. I just feel like I’ve grown from that aspect of it. I’m a hands-on person, so getting to try these things without [the] renting of equipment or having to buy my own stuff and just given the stuff and go at it, it really showed me that I can actually do something really cool that I never knew I could do before” (Student Interview 7)*

## Findings: The Immigrants Working Centre Partnership

The courses developed in partnership with the Immigrants Working Centre (IWC) were delivered to students who were (at the time of interview) refugee claimants. As previously mentioned, refugee claimants face a complex array of challenges due to their indeterminate status. Notwithstanding the fact that discussions regarding the refugee claimant populations are a polarizing issue in Canada (as elsewhere), with regard to both their irregular mode of arrival and their participation in the workforce (Reynolds & Hyndman, 2015; Rehaag, 2017; Connoy, 2018)<sup>3</sup>, there are a number of organizations (such as the IWC) that work with refugee claimant populations while they wait for their asylum claim to be adjudicated. To date, much of the research on the employment trajectories of refugee populations has focused on conventional refugees rather than refugee claimants per se (Ager & Strang, 2008). As such, our research was an opportunity to deepen the knowledge we have of the barriers such populations face.

<sup>3</sup> The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada uses the term “irregular” to describe persons crossing the border “between ports of entry” to seek asylum. Individuals making such an entry are subject to a “rigorous process to determine whether or not you have a legitimate claim according to Canadian and International law” (<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/campaigns/irregular-border-crossings-asylum/understanding-the-system.html>). Once an individual makes a claim, they are granted temporary resident status, albeit with limited access to settlement services. Individuals determined to need protection are eventually granted the designation “protected person”, with rejected applicants subject to removal and deportation (<https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/statistics/Pages/Irregular-border-crossover-statistics.aspx>).

## Partnership synergies

The IWC partnership highlights a key advantage of City School programming for partner organizations insofar as it can help free up the resources and capacity of such organizations to better serve their client populations. Crucially, the co-location of the mobile classroom in downtown Hamilton adjacent to the IWC was greatly beneficial as it meant that students were able to avail themselves of their services while there. As such, the partnership was an opportunity to deliver a more complete package of services designed to prepare participants for the labour force and to boost their job readiness. The following information details the additional training undertaken by participants<sup>4</sup>:

- 67 individuals in TradesLink participated in at least one City School mobile class.
- 34 of these individuals secured (entry-level) employment. Of this number, 23 secured permanent employment, eight secured contract employment, and for three individuals the type of employment is unknown.
- As participants in TradesLink, a number of participants completed other work-ready certifications. These certifications may have been completed before or after their participation in the City School program, depending on each individual's unique pathway through the program. Of the 67 participants:
  - 13 completed Globally Harmonized Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).
  - 37 completed Workers Health and Safety in four steps.
  - 20 completed Forklift Operator certification.
  - Eight completed Working at Heights certification.
  - Two participants participated in Rodman Training with the Iron Workers Local 736 training (prior to their participation in City School).
  - One participant completed concrete form setting training with LiUNA Local 837.
  - Four participants accessed Advanced Welding Techniques for training towards a Canadian Welding Bureau Ticket (with funding obtained through the IWC).

It should be noted that tracking postsecondary transition rates is not an objective of the TradesLink course deliveries. In most cases, refugee claimants are required to pay international student fees until such time as they receive the designation of “protected person”. The cost involved, combined with their uncertain status, therefore makes the option of pursuing a postsecondary course of study a precarious prospect for many<sup>5</sup>. As such, pathways are

---

<sup>4</sup> This data was provided by the IWC (May 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Although they may be eligible for specific bursaries and grants (with this varying according to institution), the Ontario Student Assistant Program (OSAP) is limited to Canadian citizens, permanent residents, designated

*“I will say... a big thank you [to the college] for introducing such a course for newcomers because I feel a sense of belonging and, also, it energizes someone like me to be able to learn more and to aspire to be great in some trade. It’s a good thing” (IWC student interview 9)*

employment-focused, with students connected to job opportunities through IWC employment services.

## Acculturating to workplace norms and expectations

Most students appeared to be committed and enthusiastic course participants, although their engagement with course content was necessarily contextualized by feelings of uncertainty and anxiety as they waited for their asylum claim to be processed, a predicament frequently mentioned during interviews. Given that refugee claimants are legally permitted to obtain a work permit and seek employment within 30 days of arrival, participation in the course allowed students to improve their knowledge of Canadian workplace norms and expectations, thereby easing their transition to the workforce. A common theme in interviews was how the course shifted participants’ perceptions of workplace safety protocols, with several interviewed students alluding to previous employment experiences where such protocols were not observed.

## Connecting to an employment pathway

Several students expressed their unease of being dependent on government-provided income supports (while being greatly appreciative of such assistance) and acknowledged their lack of agency regarding their ability to shape their future due to their precarious status. Such unease was

compounded for those students with dependents. A consequence of this was a preoccupation for most with finding employment, despite the fact that such employment would typically not align with their previous educational and/or employment experience (a point to note here is that being

*“When I took this course, I know I am going to get something positive... this course has made my eyes open more in terms of building (my) skills... and it showed me that I have a future in Canada. I want to work and I want to open doors for me to get a job.... This (course) is part of the training that will help me get a job. I know that it won’t be difficult anymore. I know that by the grace of God, this next month, next month... I will get a job” (IWC student interview 21)*

---

refugees, and protected persons. Refugee claimants on a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) (such as a work permit) can engage in short-term course of study while the visa remains valid. Students wishing to take a course that is longer than six months need to apply for a study permit. Refugee claimants without a TRV also need to apply for a study permit.

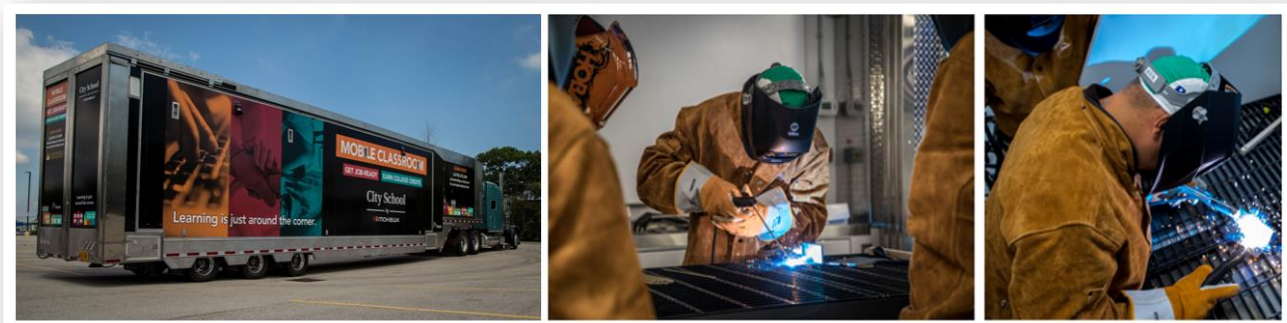
employed in a job that fails to match an individual's education and training is associated with decreased mental health and feelings of belonging in the long-term) (Hynie & Changoor, 2016).

In the event of a student receiving a positive verdict on their asylum claim, it is possible that they would become more discerning as to their future occupational pathway, and as more options became available to them.

Assuming such employment in the short-term, however, temporarily sidesteps the challenge faced by such populations in converting their previous employment experience and/ or educational qualifications into a Canadian context of relevance (Hynie & Changoor; 2016; Friesen et al., 2018). At the same time,

however, the construction/ welding focus of the courses was particularly beneficial for those students with experience in those fields, but who lacked Canadian experience. At a minimum, therefore, the course experience provided participants with an opportunity to reboot their employment trajectories, pivot their professional identities, and begin making plans as potential permanent residents.

*I'm just here for a while, not that much, but I hope to stay here for longer [...] I would like to (get) a job in this field and I need to see what are the chances? What (are) the chances available? What (are) the opportunities available? What is my value?... I'll open up the door and I'll figure out how I can enter in. (IWC student interview 14)*



## Building social and professional networks

The IWC works directly with students in facilitating their social and economic integration through the provision of a range of services and programs designed to strengthen refugees' social bridges and social bonds. As noted by Korntheur et al. (2017), the integration trajectories of refugee populations are decisively shaped by the forging of social bridges (such as connections between students and employers), social bonds (connections that link members of a group with each other), and social links (connections with agencies and organizations such as the IWC and Mohawk College) (see also Ager & Strang, 2008).



As previous research into City School has shown, students nurture a sense of solidarity and community through the shared course experience (Bourke et al, 2020). However, the classroom cooperation and social bonds established among students involved in IWC course deliveries seemed particularly strong, quite likely due to their common status as refugee claimants. In contrast to previous findings, however, students enrolled in the IWC deliveries typically lack attachment to the communities in which they reside, as would be expected considering their status as newcomers. To this end, participation in the course provided students with the opportunity to begin building the community and professional networks and social bridges conducive to permanent settlement, albeit subject to them receiving a positive verdict on their asylum claim.

## Reflections and recommendations

---

Our research has contributed to a growing evidence base regarding the efficacy of using mobile classroom delivery models as a poverty-reduction strategy for underserved populations. There is little doubt that the addition of the mobile classroom has boosted the capacity of the College to work with underserved communities and partners in designing and delivering college programming to a wider range of student cohorts. It is also clear from the research that the demographic profile of students who enroll in a City School course continues to evolve. While City School continues to deliver college programming to residents and underserved populations in Hamilton's low-income communities, it also increasingly serves students seeking to return to education with a view to exploring new career trajectories, students in rural areas, and provides training opportunities for newcomers seeking to enter the Canadian workforce and become Canadian citizens.

In addition, it has become clear that transitioning to a postsecondary course of study is not the overriding concern of many students who participate in City School mobile programming. Despite being an issue only implicitly raised in interviews, there did seem to be the recognition among students that the model of workforce preparation through full-time postsecondary education (e.g., committing to a full-time program of study) is not what they were searching for. Although this is partly due to the nature of the skills-based programming delivered through the mobile classrooms, it is also attributable to the appetite among participating students for a short-term course of study designed to connect them directly with an employment opportunity. What they are seeking are the skills that will assist them to embark on such a pathway. Continuing to address this need requires ongoing consultation and collaboration with partners and employers regarding the design and delivery of City School programming. In other words, strengthening



City School programming to address skills shortages identified by industry necessitates the increasing foregrounding of the perspectives and involvement of industry partners.

Findings from the course deliveries to the refugee claimant cohorts reveal how the socially integrative process is characterized by both individual (e.g., the language barrier, feelings of belonging, etc.) and structural (e.g., access to education and/or employment) dimensions (Korntheur et al., 2017). Although we acknowledge the complex and often contentious nature of discussions regarding the integration of refugee populations in Canada (as elsewhere), research has illustrated how inclusive integration policies have been associated with more positive attitudes towards refugees (both conventional refugees and refugee claimants) in society in general (Hynie, 2018). Furthermore, research indicates such policies have a positive impact with regard to economic participation and contribution of such populations, as well as to their health status and feelings of social inclusion (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie & Changoor, 2016; Yu, Ouellet, & Warmington, 2017).

Finally, although we acknowledge the challenges faced by employers regarding labour shortages, we are mindful of the need to ensure that employers are incentivized to create employment pathways that are attractive to socially excluded groups, lest those pathways reinforce the structural determinants of poverty and disadvantage (e.g., minimum wage, short-term contracts, and precarious forms of employment). Failure to address such determinants would likely exacerbate (or at least maintain) existing industry challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of employees. In other words, it is imperative that building employer-driven, demand-led pathways to employment account for both individual and systemic challenges. Although connecting students with entry-level positions is an important and necessary first step, our interview data indicates that students are seeking career entry points rather than jobs.



The following recommendations draw upon data collection from all course deliveries.

### **Recommendation 1: Strengthening industry-informed employment pathways**

Developing innovative models of micro-credentialing that are recognized by industry would help connect students directly with an employment or apprenticeship opportunity. The research has testified to the appetite among students for forms of certification recognized by employers that

would boost their potential for employment. Such models could be developed in close consultation with employers in response to community needs. It is recommended, however, that such credentialing be positioned as subsidiary to, rather than as an alternative to, traditional postsecondary pathways. Such positioning maintains a conceptualization of education premised upon a strong foundation of broad knowledge and vocational skills, one that acknowledges the importance of nurturing the critical thinking and communication skills of students. In other words, the design and development of pathways that include micro-credentialing should be employer-informed rather than employer-driven.

### **Recommendation 2: Mobile visibility as a recruitment and marketing strategy**

The importance of decisions made regarding the specific location of the mobile cannot be overstated. Our findings indicate that establishing and maintaining a visible presence in advance of course commencement acts as both an effective recruitment and marketing strategy. Considerations regarding location should account for pedestrian footfall patterns as well as visibility from the street for vehicle traffic. Such decisions to account for guidelines provided by the Ministry of Environment regarding noise and emissions from the mobile units.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendation 3: Boost instructional capacity to include ESL/ LINC resources**

As was evident from the courses delivered to refugee claimant students, providing trades and employment pathway programming to newcomer populations can be a challenge where there are language barriers, and the lack of familiarity such populations can have of Canadian workplace norms and protocols. In the event of course deliveries where communication between instructor and students is a challenge, the presence of an ESL/ LINC instructor or technologist would be greatly beneficial. Alternatively, the role of the instructor could be augmented by the presence of a learning support officer (LSO) with experience of working with ESL students (and to the extent that this is practically possible). Furthermore, the availability of supplementary instructional materials in ESL formats, such as videos, visual aids, or printed material would also help address communication challenges in the classroom for students for whom language is a barrier.

### **Recommendation 4: Using the mobile to boost the recruitment and participation of Indigenous residents.**

Mobile initiatives elsewhere in Canada (as briefly described on pages 6-7) have focused on delivering courses to Indigenous populations. It is important to acknowledge that the challenges

---

<sup>6</sup> Information regarding provincial guidelines on environmental noise can be found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/environmental-noise-guideline-stationary-and-transportation-sources-approval-and-planning> Information on provincial rules regarding air quality and pollution can be found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/rules-air-quality-and-pollution>

faced by Indigenous residents in accessing education are necessarily contextualized by the funding deficiencies and deeply rooted social and economic issues resulting from the history and legacy of colonialism in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). As noted by Ottmann (2017), compounding this are systemic barriers that exacerbate the education gap in postsecondary education for Indigenous students, such as postsecondary policies, programming, and curricula that fail to adequately include the histories, teachings, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples. In Hamilton, Indigenous residents aged between 25-64 have lower levels of education than the municipal average. Approximately 24% have not completed high school compared with the municipal average, and levels of postsecondary attendance are also lower (53% compared to 62%). However, the rate of trade certifications and apprenticeships is higher than other groups, although existing research suggests jobs in these fields can be precarious (e.g., short-term contracts, shifting schedules, a lack of benefits, and lower than average wages) (Maracle, 2015). Through the delivery of courses on or near reserves developed in partnership with the local community (and ideally with the inclusion of a job placement or apprenticeship opportunity), the City School mobile has the potential to assist such populations in accessing careers rather than jobs. This recommendation could be part of future research exploring the development of employer-informed employment pathways.

### **Recommendation 5: Using the mobile to boost the recruitment and participation of women in the skilled trades**

In 2012, women accounted for 14.2% of all tradespersons (Arrowsmith, 2016) in Canada. Statistics Canada have identified the necessity of increasing the participation of women in male-dominated trades as a way of improving the overall supply of skilled tradespersons as well as presenting an opportunity to foster greater gender diversity and wage equity in the workforce (Frank & Frenette, 2019). A women-focused delivery (mirroring the women-focused Introduction to Construction courses run through the Eva Rothwell Centre, the location of one of the downtown City school classroom locations) would help boost the confidence of students, help prepare them for a further course of postsecondary study and/or employment pathway, and align with a provincial and federal push regarding recruiting more women to traditionally male-dominated occupational areas (Skills Ontario, 2011; Kong, 2020). As with recommendation number four above, this recommendation could be part of future research exploring the development of employer-informed employment pathways.

### **Recommendation 6: Centralizing City School information and resources**

Several students were disheartened by occasional class cancellations due to the unavailability of faculty, periods of time spent waiting for a guest speaker to arrive, or reported feeling

overwhelmed by the number of guest speakers. Although eliminating cancellations or waiting periods is perhaps not entirely feasible despite the exemplary efforts of all those involved in course design and delivery, it is recommended that the participation of guest speakers and class visits be streamlined as much as is practically possible. A recommendation is to establish a College “contact” webpage (ideally via Canvas, the College’s online learning management system) that centralizes information for students on college services and contact personnel.

### **Recommendation # 7: Equity, diversity, and social inclusion (EDI) workshops**

It is recommended that workshops in equity, diversity, and social inclusion (EDI) be made available to all community access and engagement personnel, including those involved in course design and delivery. City School students are increasingly composed of newcomer populations, such as immigrants and refugee groups, as well as individuals from Indigenous communities and diverse racialized groups. In light of this, it is important that all personnel working with vulnerable populations be sensitized to the complex array of barriers, challenges, and perceptions such individuals face, and in order to reaffirm institutional commitment to the guiding principles of EDI. This recommendation aligns with anti-racism strategies being enacted at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels (see e.g., Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2010; Government of Canada, 2019)<sup>7</sup>. Such workshops could also include reflection on how the experiences of racialized groups intersect with such variables as socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, and ability.

### **Recommendation 8: Responding to the COVID-19 crisis**

The unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 crisis has dealt a devastating blow across the labour market, including those employed in the skilled trades. The economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis is also likely to increase the numbers of individuals seeking a career in the skilled trades. Although the crisis presents a formidable challenge for courses centred on a hands-on, tactile learning experience such as those offered through the mobile classroom, it is also important to explore how it is impacting the (anticipated) labour shortages of employers and to explore how City School can respond accordingly. This recommendation could also be part of future research exploring the development of employer-informed employment pathways.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Hamilton Anti-Racism Resource Centre (HARRC) was launched in 2018 as a collaborative initiative between the City of Hamilton, McMaster University, and the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion. See <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/priority-projects/anti-racism-resource-centre>

## Conclusion: Assessing the mobile delivery model

---

A central aim of the research was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mobile delivery model in connecting students with a postsecondary and/or employment pathway. Although previous research has found that the neighbourhood-based college classroom in the community model is advantageous in several ways, the situation regarding the unique locational flexibility of the mobile classroom is more complicated. While the permanent and pop-up neighbourhood-based classroom locations tend to draw students primarily (although by no means exclusively) from the neighbourhoods they are located in, this is not necessarily the case for the mobile classroom. Typically, City School course enrollment priority is given to neighbourhood residents, along with the key criterion of level of education (the recruitment process favours those with less). In the event of a course being undersubscribed, however, the recruitment net is flung a little further. Furthermore, as the City School partnership continues to grow with recruitment efforts assisted by such third parties as Ontario Works, prospective students are coming from more diverse parts of the city, a trend that is likely to continue.

At present, approximately 30 per-cent of enrolled students travel to a classroom location within a 20-23-minute walk. Other students drive from across the city to a classroom location, or from another township altogether, a trip which sometimes involves driving past one of the main College campuses. In essence, the unique selling feature of the classroom as a mobile unit depends on the student cohort and the specific nature of the course delivery. For example, course deliveries in more outlying regions such as Dunnville were beneficial for students with transportation barriers (as these areas can be poorly served by public transit). For these students, and as indicated by information gathered during course follow-up phone calls with former students, a lack of personal transportation and inadequate bus service would have likely prevented them from travelling to a campus location.

Regarding course deliveries in urban areas, the mobile is perhaps most efficacious when located adjacent to service providers. For example, courses delivered in partnership with the IWC TradesLink program benefited from the downtown location, particularly due to the proximity of the mobile location to the additional support and services offered through the IWC. Such co-location supports the *raison d'être* of using "community hubs" to offer a "one-stop" shop regarding service provision (Pitre, 2008). This seems to be particularly crucial for newcomer populations, who typically lack social capital (e.g., community connections and networks) and access to the social bridging and networking opportunities that can help them gain access to an educational and/or employment pathway. This is despite the fact that the majority of students

arrived at the classroom location from outside the neighbourhood in which the mobile was located.

Initial grassroots engagement in the community continues to be crucial to creating awareness of City School programming, as prospective students become aware of City School in a variety of ways, such as through advertisements placed in neighbourhood locations (e.g., ranging from bus shelters to local community hubs or gathering places), through social media (City School has an active presence of such forums as Facebook and Twitter), via the main College website, or through word of mouth recommendation. Notwithstanding these efforts, we have found that many people in the community learn about the opportunities available through City School after happening upon a mobile unit in a visible location in their community.

Findings indicate that the mobile is best utilized when placed in a conspicuous neighbourhood location well in advance of course commencement (and to the extent that it is feasible to do so). Several respondents who completed a course at the Main St. West location commented on acquaintances of their expressing disappointment at finding out about the mobile presence too late. The course deliveries at the Centre-on-Barton location (the most visible) had the most applicants, and several students commented on how they became aware of the mobile while shopping at the plaza, or when travelling by either car or bus. Such findings highlight the importance of accounting for local footfall patterns and the extent to which the mobile is visible from the street, as the mobile itself serves as an advertisement for City School. Considering this, it is difficult to overstate the impact of the neighbourhood-based presence of the classroom unit as a recruitment strategy, and of the exposure it provides to residents regarding accessing the programming available through City School.

Finally, and at the time of writing, we are mindful of how the COVID-19 pandemic presents a formidable challenge for those seeking to access postsecondary and/or embark on a pathway to employment, and particularly in light of growing evidence regarding the differential socioeconomic impact of the crisis (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2020). Such concerns necessitate positioning the mobile classroom as part of a programmatic response that remains responsive to the shifting contours of economic uncertainty, employment precarity, and the unequal distribution of the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable populations.



# References

- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008) Understanding integration: A conceptual framework, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2). 166-191.
- Arrowsmith, E. (2016) Apprenticeship Analysis: Women and Apprenticeship in Canada. Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. [https://caf-fca.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Member9\\_Women-and-Apprenticeship.pdf](https://caf-fca.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Member9_Women-and-Apprenticeship.pdf)
- Boothby, D & Drews, T. (2006). *Returns to apprenticeship in Canada. Canadian labour market and skills researcher network, Working paper no. 70.*  
<http://www.clsrn.econ.ubc.ca/workingpapers/CLSRN%20Working%20Paper%20no.%2070%20-%20Boothby%20and%20Drewes.pdf>
- Bourke, A., Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E., Shearer, N. & J. Atkinson. (2019a). Bringing college classrooms to the community: Promoting postsecondary access for low-income adults through neighbourhood-based college courses. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 49(1), 159-175.
- Bourke, A., Tascón, C., Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E. & Campbell. M. (2019b). *The City School Partnership: A community-built response to improving access to education (2016-2019). Final Research Report*, Community Access and Engagement. Mohawk College.  
<https://www.mohawkcollege.ca/programs/get-prepared-for-college/city-school-by-mohawk/learn-more-about-city-school/reports-and>
- Bourke, A., Vanderveken, J., Ecker, E., Bell., H., & Richie, K. (2020). “Teaching is a learning experience”: Exploring faculty engagement with low-income adult learners in a college-community partnership program. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 43(2), 313-340.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Buildforce Canada. (2017). *2017-2026 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward, Ontario.*  
<https://www.constructionforecasts.ca/sites/forecast/files/highlights/2017/2017-ON-Constr-Maint-Looking-Forward.pdf>
- Buist, S. (2019). *Code Red: 10 years later.* Hamilton Spectator. Retrieved from <https://www.thespec.com/news-story/9187352-code-red-10-years-later/>.
- Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Statement: Inequality amplified by COVID-19 crisis.*  
<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/statement-inequality-amplified-covid-19-crisis>
- Cleveland, J., & C. Rousseau. (2013). Psychiatric symptoms associated with brief detention of adult asylum seekers in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 58(7), 409-416.
- Consterdine, E. (2018). *State-of-the-art report on public attitudes, political discourses and media coverage on the arrival of refugees.* CEASEVAL Research on the Common European Asylum System.  
[http://ceaseval.eu/publications/02\\_Consterdine\\_State-of-the-art\\_report\\_on\\_public\\_attitudes.pdf](http://ceaseval.eu/publications/02_Consterdine_State-of-the-art_report_on_public_attitudes.pdf)
- Epp, M. (2017). *Refugees in Canada: A brief history.* Canadian Historical Association.
- Deloitte. (2020). *The economic impact of City School.* Mohawk College Foundation.  
[https://issuu.com/mohawkcollege/docs/mohawk\\_college\\_-\\_economic\\_impact\\_of\\_city\\_school](https://issuu.com/mohawkcollege/docs/mohawk_college_-_economic_impact_of_city_school)

- Dempsey, S. (2010). Critiquing community engagement. *Management Communication Quarterly* 24(3), 359-390.
- Frank, K., & Frenette, M. (2019). How do women in male-dominated apprenticeships fare in the labour force? Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series, Statistics Canada, March 13. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11fo019m/11fo019m2019008-eng.htm>
- Friesen, C., & Sherrell, K. (2018). Refugee claimants in BC: Understanding current irregular arrival trends. *Immigrant Services Society of BC*. [https://bcrefugeehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Refugee\\_Claimants\\_in\\_BC-2018.pdf](https://bcrefugeehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Refugee_Claimants_in_BC-2018.pdf)
- Government of Canada. (2019). Building a foundation for change: Canada's anti-racism strategy. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/anti-racism-strategy.html>
- Hall, B., & Tremblay, C. (2012). *Learning from SSHRC-funded partnerships: Community outcomes and conditions for success*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The Centre for Public Sector Studies. University of Victoria. [communityresearchcanada.ca/res/download.php?id=4309](http://communityresearchcanada.ca/res/download.php?id=4309)
- Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). Channeling change: Making collective impact work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. <http://www.mvaec.ca/downloads/stanford-social-innovation-review.pdf>
- Holmes, A., & Hjartarson, J. (2014). *Moving forward together. An Employer Perspective on the Design of Skills Training Programs in Ontario*. Essential Skills Ontario. [https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/Moving\\_Forward\\_Together-1.pdf](https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/Moving_Forward_Together-1.pdf)
- Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA). (2014). *Apprenticeship reform: Ontario's future depends on it*. <https://www.hrpa.ca/Documents/Membership/Public-Affairs/Apprenticeship-Reform-WhitePaper-2014.pdf>
- Hynie, M., & Changoor, T. (2016). Employment pathways for refugees: Barriers on the pathway to a good job and the importance of getting there (pp. 31-35). In H. Ramos (Ed.), *Beyond the welcome*. Metropolis. [https://nsiip.ca/wp-content/uploads/Canadian\\_Diversity\\_ENG.pdf](https://nsiip.ca/wp-content/uploads/Canadian_Diversity_ENG.pdf)
- Hynie, M. (2018). Refugee integration: Research and policy. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 24(3), 265-276.
- Immigrant Working Centre. (2018). TradesLink prepares newcomers for jobs in construction. *Unpack Magazine*. Immigrant Working Centre. <https://iwchamilton.ca/unpack/tradeslink-prepares-newcomers-for-jobs-in-construction/>
- Jepsen, C., Troske, K., & Coomes, P. (2014). The labour-market returns to community college degrees, diplomas, and certificates. *Journal of Labour Economics*, 32(1), 95-121.
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#)
- Kong, S. (February, 2020). *Why we need more women in these particular careers than ever before*. Macleans. <https://www.macleans.ca/work/women-in-skilled-trades/>
- Korntheuer, A., Pritcard, P., & Maehler, D. (2017). Structural context of refugee integration in Canada and Germany. *GESIS-Schriftenreihe*, 15.
- Kronick, R. (2018). Mental health of refugees and asylum seekers: Assessment and intervention. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 63(5): 290-296.

- Lam, M. (2018). "We can't paint them all with one brush: Creating opportunities for learning about refugee protection. *Refuge*, 34(2).
- Li S., Liddell B., Nickerson, A. (2016). The relationship between post-migration stress and psychological disorders in refugees and asylum seekers. *Current Psychiatric Reports*, 18(9), 82
- Loewen, G., Silver, J., August, M., Bruning, P., MacKensie, M., & Meyerson, S. (2005). *Moving low-income people in Winnipeg's inner city into good jobs: Evidence on what works best*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.  
[https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba\\_Pubs/2005/Moving\\_People\\_into\\_Good\\_Jobs.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba_Pubs/2005/Moving_People_into_Good_Jobs.pdf)
- Lutz, J., & Neis, B. (2008). *Making and moving knowledge: Interdisciplinary and community-based research*, McGill-Queens University Press.
- MacMillan, P., & Young, B. (2015). *Working together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system*. Deloitte & Social Capital Partners. [https://ccednet.rcdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/working\\_together.pdf](https://ccednet.rcdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/working_together.pdf)
- Maguire, M., & DelaHunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(3), Autumn.
- Manpower Group. (2018). *Solving the talent shortage: Build, buy, borrow, and bridge*. *Talent Shortage Survey*.  
[https://go.manpowergroup.com/hubfs/TalentShortage%202018%20\(Global\)%20Assets/PDFs/MG\\_TalentShortage2018\\_lo%206\\_25\\_18\\_FINAL.pdf](https://go.manpowergroup.com/hubfs/TalentShortage%202018%20(Global)%20Assets/PDFs/MG_TalentShortage2018_lo%206_25_18_FINAL.pdf)
- Maracle, Y., Mayo, S., McCormack, C. (2015). *Profile of Hamilton's Aboriginal residents*. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Profile-of-Hamiltons-Aboriginal-Residents.pdf>
- Mayo, S., Klassen, C. & Bahkt, L. (2012). *Neighbourhood profiles: Beasley, Crown Point, Jamesville, Keith, Landsdale, McQuesten, Quigley Road, Riverdale, Rolston, South Sherman, and Stinson*. Prepared for United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. [http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2012/03/2012-ReportNeighbourhood\\_Profiles\\_March.pdf](http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2012/03/2012-ReportNeighbourhood_Profiles_March.pdf)
- Mayo, S. (2012). *Profile of Hamilton's Downtown Area*. Prepared for: Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre. [http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2012/01/2012-ReportProfile\\_of\\_Hamiltons\\_Downtown\\_Area\\_January.pdf](http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2012/01/2012-ReportProfile_of_Hamiltons_Downtown_Area_January.pdf)
- Mosher, J., Anucha, U., Appiah, H., & Levesque, S. (2014). From research to action: Four theories and their implications for knowledge mobilization. *Scholarly and Research Communication* 5(3), 1-17.
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2010). Anti-racism and discrimination for municipalities. [http://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Anti-racism\\_and\\_anti-discrimination\\_for\\_municipalities%3A\\_Introductory\\_manual.pdf](http://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Anti-racism_and_anti-discrimination_for_municipalities%3A_Introductory_manual.pdf)
- Oreopoulos, P. & Petronijevic, U. (2013). *Making college worth it: A review of research on the returns to higher education*, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper No. 19053. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w19053>
- Ottmann, J. (2017). Canada's Indigenous people's access to postsecondary education: The

- of the “New Buffalo” (pp. 95-117). In Frawley, J., Larkin, S., & Smith, J. (Eds.), *Indigenous pathways, transitions and participation in higher education: From policy to practice*. Springer Singapore. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811040610>
- Peacock, D. (2013). Neoliberal social inclusion? The agenda of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance. *Critical Studies in Education*, 53(3), 311-325
- Pitre, K. (2014). *Community hubs in Ontario: A strategic framework and action plan*. <http://www.ontario.ca/page/community-hubs-ontario-strategic-framework-and-action-plan>
- Raderstrong, J., & Boyea-Robinson, T. (2016). The why and how of working with communities through collective impact. *Community Development*, 47(2), 1-13.
- Rehaag, S. (2017), "I Simply do not believe...!": A case study of credibility determinations in Canadian refugee adjudication". *Windsor Review of Legal and Social Studies*, 38.
- Reynolds, J. & J. Hyndman. (2015). A Turn in Canadian Refugee Policy and Practice. *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 16(2), 41-55.
- Sandmann, L. (2008). Conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement in higher education: A strategic review 1996-2006. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 12(1), 91-104.
- Scull, S., & Cuthill, M. (2010). Engaged outreach: Using community engagement to facilitate access to higher education for people from low socio-economic backgrounds. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 29(1), 59-74.
- Shawyer, F., Enticott, J., Block, A., Cheng, I., & Meadows, G. (2017). The mental health status of refugees and asylum seekers attending a refugee health clinic including comparisons with a matched sample of Australian-born residents. *BMC Psychiatry* 17, 76.
- Smyth, G., & Cottrill, C. (2011). Women working in the skilled trades and technologies. Skills Ontario. [https://buildtogether.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/09/women\\_working\\_in\\_trades\\_pub.pdf](https://buildtogether.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/09/women_working_in_trades_pub.pdf)
- Sprague, J. (2005). Qualitative shifts: Feminist strategies in field research and interviewing. In *Feminist Methodologies for critical researchers: Bridging differences* (pp. 119-164). Walnut Creek, CA: Altimira.
- Steele, L., & Abdelaaty, L. (2018). Ethnic diversity and support for refugees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.45(11), 1833-1856
- Sullivan, K. (2017). *Talent in transition: Addressing the skills mismatch in Ontario*. Ontario Chamber of Commerce. <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/Talent-in Transition.pdf>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Summary: Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring\\_the\\_Truth\\_Reconciling\\_for\\_the\\_Future\\_July\\_23\\_2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)
- Turrini G., Purgato, M., Ballette, F., Nose, M., Ostuzzi, G., Barbui, C. (2017). Common mental disorders in asylum seekers and refugees: Umbrella review of prevalence and intervention studies. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 11:51.
- Wingard J. (2014). *Working together: Examining employment, education, and training strategies for the Jamesville, Beasley, and Keith neighbourhoods. A report of the Labour Market*

*Action Partnership* (with contributions by Sarah Hosick) by the City of Hamilton, Mohawk College, and Workforce Planning Hamilton.

<https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/media/browser/2015-03-06/workingtogether2014.pdf>

Weerakoon, Y., & MacDonald, R. (2018). *Jobs for locals at the Hamilton Port: A demand led strategy for building post-secondary pathways through Mohawk College*. Mohawk College.

<https://ocwi-coie.ca/project/jobs-for-locals-at-the-hamilton-port/>

Workforce Planning Hamilton. (2019). *Employer One Survey*.

<http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/429>

Yu, S., Ouellet, E., & Warmington, A. (2017). Refugee integration in Canada: A survey of empirical evidence and existing services. *Refuge*, 24(2), 17-34.

