

NEWCOMER RETENTION IN NORTH BAY



This five-year collaborative research project explores the experiences of newcomers in North Bay and identifies factors influencing settlement and long-term retention. Year 1 findings are based on a literature review, a mixed-method survey of 154 newcomers, and two focus groups with 9 participants. The study highlights both the strengths of North Bay and the barriers that affect newcomer integration and retention.

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Introduction

North Bay continues to welcome newcomers, including international students, temporary foreign workers, permanent residents, and other recent arrivals. Understanding newcomer experiences is important for improving settlement supports, strengthening inclusion, and increasing long-term retention particularly in smaller communities that face unique challenges in attracting and retaining newcomers (Esse & Carter, 2019). This study examines the factors that shape newcomer experiences in North Bay, including housing, employment, healthcare, transportation, education, and social inclusion. Findings are intended to help guide service providers, policymakers, and community organizations in designing effective strategies to support newcomer integration and retention.

Research Questions

- This study aimed to answer three central questions:
- What is the experience of newcomers within the first year and subsequent years following their arrival in North Bay?
 - What factors influence newcomers to choose to settle in the community of North Bay?
 - What factors influence newcomer retention in North Bay?

Key Findings

North Bay continues to welcome newcomers, including international students, temporary foreign workers, permanent residents, and other recent arrivals.

- **Housing:** Housing emerged as a significant challenge in North Bay. Participants reported barriers related to rising rental costs, limited housing stock, accessibility issues, lack of rental history, and unfamiliarity with the housing system. These challenges were especially significant for international students and families seeking long-term accommodation. At the same time, North Bay's relative affordability compared with larger urban centres presents an opportunity to attract individuals and families relocating from urban areas.
- **Employment and Financial Stability:** Many newcomers, particularly those without permanent residency or relevant Canadian work experience, encountered employment challenges. Underemployment was noted as a barrier, alongside the need for local references and the lack of recognition for international experience. Despite these limitations, North Bay's growing labour needs and smaller labour pool could support targeted job pathways, mentorship opportunities, and employment supports tailored to newcomer qualifications and goals.
- **Healthcare Access:** Healthcare access was identified as a challenge among both survey and focus group participants. Long wait times, difficulty accessing primary care and mental health services, and a lack of culturally appropriate care were recurring concerns. Newcomers may also face additional barriers related to language access, understanding how to navigate the healthcare system, and gaps in coverage upon arrival.
- **Transportation:** Public transportation limitations were frequently cited as barriers to accessing employment, education, and healthcare services, particularly outside core areas and during evenings and weekends. Participants also identified challenges with the reliability and user-friendliness of the dynamic dispatching system. These limitations disproportionately affected newcomers, students, and residents without personal vehicles.
- **Education:** Newcomers with children expressed concern over limited academic support and a lack of culturally inclusive programming. At the same time, North Bay's educational institutions were generally viewed as accessible and safe. Strengthening academic support services, career counseling, and cultural inclusion initiatives in schools could further support long-term family integration.
- **Community Atmosphere and Social Inclusion:** Many newcomers described North Bay as peaceful and welcoming; however, common challenges included isolation and discrimination. Isolation affected sense of belonging and could occur independently of other negative experiences. Discrimination also posed barriers to full inclusion and participation in community life. North Bay's manageable size and community spirit present opportunities to strengthen belonging through inclusive events, peer support networks, and diversity-focused planning.
- **Retention Intentions:** Retention intentions were encouraging. According to survey data, 51.12% of respondents intend to stay in North Bay for more than 5 years, and 78.19% want to stay for more than 3 years. Many newcomers were drawn to North Bay's peaceful atmosphere, natural surroundings, and safety. Retention intentions were strongly associated with a sense of belonging, opportunities for professional growth, and family well-being.

Understanding newcomer experiences is important for improving settlement supports, strengthening inclusion, and increasing long-term retention in the community. This study examines the factors that shape newcomer experiences in North Bay, including housing, employment, healthcare, transportation, education, and social inclusion. Findings are intended to help guide service providers, policymakers, and community organizations in designing effective strategies to support newcomer integration and retention (Rios, 2024).

Study Design & Participant Overview

This first-year phase used a mixed-method approach.

- Survey respondents: 154 newcomers
- Focus groups: 2 focus groups with 9 participants
- Data collection period: October 2024 to March 2025
- Eligibility: newcomers who had lived in North Bay between 3 months and 5 years

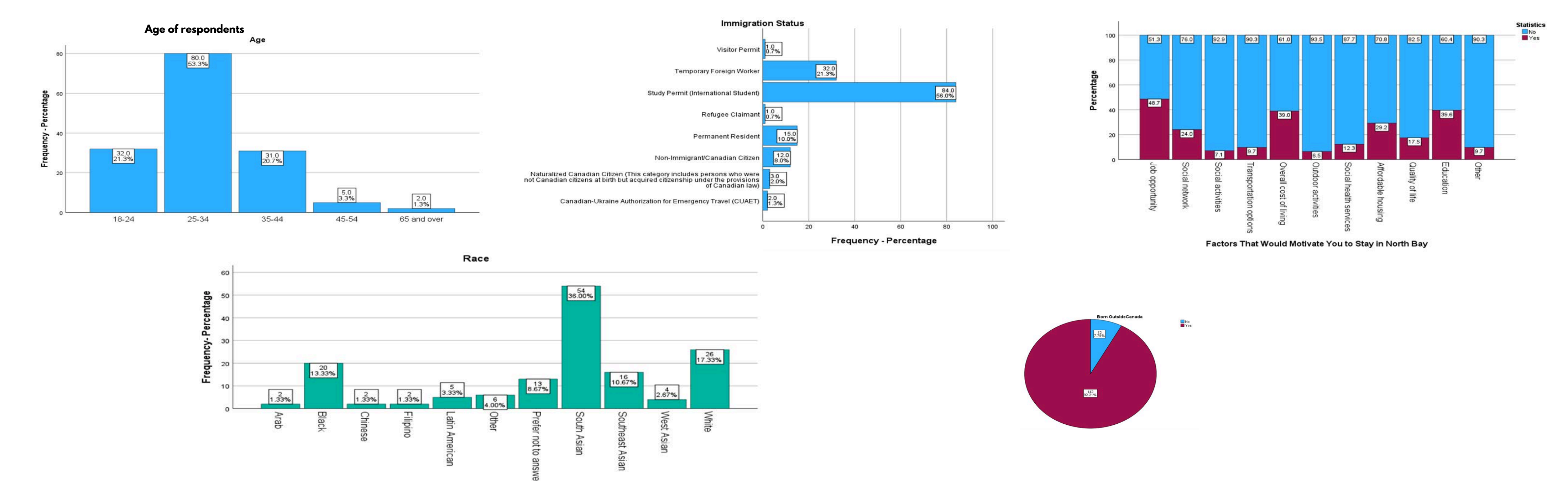
Participants were recruited through community organizations, post-secondary institutions, social media networks, and local radio channels.

Participant Overview

- 52% identified as female, 46.7% as male, and 1.3% preferred not to disclose
- Most respondents were aged 25–34 (53.3%), followed by 18–24 (21.3%) and 35–44 (20.7%)
- Respondents came from a wide range of countries; the largest group originated from India (53.3%), followed by Nigeria (6.7%) and Canada (6%)
- Over half of respondents (56%) held Study Permit status, followed by Temporary Foreign Workers (21.3%) and Permanent Residents (10%)

Analysis

The first round of data collection generated valuable insights into the newcomer experience in North Bay. Findings highlight both strengths and barriers affecting settlement and long-term retention. Many newcomers described North Bay as peaceful, safe, and welcoming, with attractive natural surroundings and a family-friendly environment. At the same time, challenges related to housing, employment, healthcare access, transportation, education, and social inclusion influenced both settlement experiences and future plans.



Conclusion

North Bay offers a peaceful, family-friendly environment with strong potential to support newcomer integration and long-term retention. While challenges remain, particularly in housing, employment, and access to services, the community also demonstrates many strengths. With targeted policies, collaborative services, and a focus on inclusion, North Bay can better support newcomers not only to arrive, but to thrive and remain in the community (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Esse & Carter, 2019).

- Strategic Recommendations:**
1. Increase promotion and visibility of settlement services and programs
 2. Expand employment programming and supports
 3. Strengthen community belonging and engagement
 4. Improve access to healthcare
 5. Improve access to affordable housing
 6. Strengthen transportation infrastructure
 7. Enhance data collection and evidence-based decision making

References:

Rios, L. (2024). New beginnings: Fostering a sense of belonging and integrating newcomers as young professionals in Calgary. Mount Royal University

Esse, V., Carter C. (2019). Beyond the Big City: How Small Communities Across Canada Can Attract and Retain Newcomers

Kaushik, V., & Drolet, J. (2018). Settlement and integration needs of skilled immigrants in Canada. *Social Sciences*, 7(5), 76