



Newcomer Group Blood Drive Initiative Community Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Newcomer Blood Drive Initiative was a pilot led by the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) in collaboration with the Greater Victoria Local Immigration Partnership (GVLIP) and Canadian Blood Services. The initiative explored whether participating in a group blood donation could support newcomers' sense of belonging while contributing to community wellbeing.

The pilot engaged newcomers and ICA staff through targeted outreach and education sessions, resulting in 15 blood donations and 5 stem cell registry sign-ups. A post-donation survey and informal feedback indicated that donating as a group felt more meaningful than donating alone and strengthened participants' sense of connection to the community.

The initiative also surfaced important systemic and practical barriers, including language access, misinformation about eligibility, and childcare constraints. Despite its small scale, the pilot demonstrated that group-based blood donation is feasible, positively experienced, and worth refining and repeating, particularly as a low-cost community-building activity for newcomers.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Newcomers often face challenges in developing a sense of belonging in their new communities, even when they are actively engaged in settlement services. Opportunities that allow newcomers to contribute to the wider community, rather than only receive support, potentially may help strengthen connection, confidence, and mutual recognition.

This pilot was informed by positive blood donation experiences shared by newcomers involved in GVLIP activities. These experiences raised interest in whether participation in a shared, community-framed blood donation initiative could provide a simple and meaningful way for newcomers to contribute.

While blood donation itself is an individual activity, the initiative was organized and promoted as a collective effort. Participants registered under a common initiative and donated within a defined time period, allowing flexibility while still being part of a shared community action.

Canadian Blood Services shared that while current blood donation levels are generally sufficient, participation from racialized communities remains limited. Besides that, the stem cell registry relies heavily on donor genetic diversity. ICA, as a newcomer settlement organization working with people from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, was well-positioned to help share accurate information and increase awareness of blood and stem cell donation among underrepresented groups.

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

This pilot initiative was implemented through collaboration between:

- **GVLIP** – initiative concept, community outreach, and evaluation framing.
- **Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA)** – outreach, client engagement, and logistical support.
- **Canadian Blood Services** – education sessions and blood/stem cell donation services.
- **Blue Bird Cabs** – free drive to and from the donor centre in Victoria and Saanich areas.

The initiative took place in November - December 2025 and centered on organizing a group blood donation appointment supported by pre-event education and outreach.

INITIATIVE DESIGN & PARTICIPATION MODEL

Join a Blood Donation Team

ICA invites newcomers to join the Blood Donation — a simple way to give back, connect with others, and feel part of your new community in Victoria. Sign up for a one-time donation (any time by December 23, 2025).

Step 1
Download the GiveBlood app from the Apple or Play Store

Step 2
If you are new to GiveBlood, please create your donor account.

Step 3
Once you have your GiveBlood account (or if you are an existing donor) go to MENU and pick **YOUR team** to register and donate as a group member:
On the menu click on **Partners** or and select **+Join Team**
Your Team: **ICA Victoria**

Step 4
From the team schedule (in *GiveBlood*- Partner tab), each donor needs to **select their individual appointment**. Once you've selected your own donation time, you are confirmed and good to go!

How to prepare before you donate blood?

- Please arrive at your specific **donation time**. Your entire donation visit will take 45 min, please plan accordingly.
- Appointments must be selected **7 DAYS** prior to donation date. All unconfirmed appointments will be auto-cancelled one week out.
- Bring a **government ID** (health card, driver's license, passport, donor card or GiveBlood app)
- **Hydrate well** (lots of water) before you donate
- **Have a meal** or salty snack - don't donate blood on an empty stomach.
- **Free snacks and drinks** will be provided during your donation.

Group Donors from Victoria ride **FREE** with our **Taxi** partner.
Call Blue Birds Cabs at **250-388-2222** (acc #22) to reserve a ride to and from the donor centre at 3449 Saanich Road (Across Uptown).

For questions, contact Haley Smith HSmith@icavictoria.org or Ann Chabert ann.chabert@blood.ca

Participation was organized through a group registration within the Canadian Blood Services application. Participants were invited to join the initiative under a shared group name and could book individual donation appointments either during a designated two-hour group timeframe, where all participants could meet in one place, or at any convenient time within a designated period. Promotion was conducted through posters, direct emails, in-person meetings, and existing community networks of ICA and GVLIP.



OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

To promote participation and address common concerns, organizers used a combination of education sessions, direct outreach, and practical supports.

Due to language-related limitations, outreach focused on ICA clients with sufficient English proficiency: LINC level 5-6 (see details below in Barriers & Challenges Identified).

Education Sessions

Information sessions were delivered by a Canadian Blood Services staff member to both staff and clients:

- ICA All-Staff meeting (~60 staff).
- ICA client in-person sessions:
 - English classes participants (32 clients).
 - Youth Group participants (2 clients).

Direct Outreach

Outreach was conducted through multiple channels to reach newcomers and partner organizations:

- Direct email to approximately 200 ICA clients with LINC level 5+ English proficiency.
- Email outreach to refugee- and newcomer-serving organizations, including Victoria Coalition of Survivors of Torture, Anglican Diocese, Island Health, and Downtown Victoria Urgent and Primary Care Centre.
- Promotion through the GVLIP partner network (~70 contacts).
- Verbal outreach through ICA community groups, including the Women's Circle (7 clients).

Participation Supports

To reduce practical barriers to participation, the following supports were provided:

- Free taxi transportation within Victoria and Saanich to and from the donation site, sponsored by Canadian Blood Services.
- ICA staff approval to attend the donation appointment during paid work time.

PARTICIPATION & OUTPUTS

As a result of the outreach and donation initiative:

Participation Outcomes

- 15 individuals donated blood.
- 5 participants joined the stem cell donor registry.

Participant Profile (observational)

- Many participants were first-time donors, first-time donors in Canada, or had not donated in over five years.

Evaluation Response

- 6 participants completed the post-donation survey.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Evaluation was conducted using a short post-donation online survey and supplemented by informal verbal feedback collected by ICA staff. The survey focused on participant motivation, group experience, sense of belonging, and interest in future community initiatives. Due to the small scale of the pilot, findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than representative.

KEY FINDINGS

Six participants completed the post-donation survey. Five respondents identified as immigrants, and one respondent was Canadian-born. Only one respondent reported that this was their first time donating blood.

Motivation to Participate

Participants were primarily motivated by a desire to help others and contribute to the community.

Group-Based Experience

All survey respondents reported that donating as part of a group felt more meaningful and connected than donating alone.

Sense of Belonging

- 67% reported feeling more connected to their community
 - 33% reported feeling somewhat more connected
- Feedback highlighted the enjoyment of donating with colleagues and pride in contributing to Canadian society.

Future Engagement

All respondents indicated interest in participating in similar group volunteering or community initiatives in the future.

Newcomer Feedback Outside the Survey

"I am so happy for the opportunity to be able to donate blood and be part of the stem cell donor community especially with you and your colleagues (ICA). Thank you for reaching out and facilitating this meaningful activity."

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

While barrier identification was not an original goal, several challenges emerged. They were collected through a survey, emails with feedback, and one-on-one communication:

- **Language access:** Interpretation and translation tools could not be used due to Canadian Blood Services' privacy policies, limiting participation for clients with lower English proficiency.
- **Misinformation and fear among racialized newcomer communities:** Some individuals expressed concerns related to DNA collection and potential government control.
- **Eligibility misunderstandings:** Confusion about donation eligibility, including past malaria exposure, travel, and age restrictions (donors must be 17 years or older).
- **Childcare constraints:** Families with young children were unable to donate together due to the need for childcare.
- **Technology barriers:** Some participants experienced difficulty using the digital questionnaires provided onsite.
- **Assumptions about LGBTQ2S+ eligibility:** there was hesitation due to assumptions that LGBTQ2S+ people are still not eligible to donate.

ADDITIONAL & UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

The initiative generated several unanticipated positive outcomes:

- Strong group camaraderie and informal social connection following the donation.
- Positive physical and emotional wellbeing reported by donors the following day.
- Increased health awareness, including early detection of low iron levels for one participant.
- Strengthened trust between participants and Canadian institutions.
- Recognition of ICA as a reliable and trustworthy facilitator, which positively influenced participation despite initial hesitations or prejudices.

Participant's Feedback

There was a huge sense of camaraderie and team of the group that donated together. We all sat around and socialized together afterwards while snacking on the delicious treats offered at the blood donation clinic.

Participant's Feedback

When I went to donate in early December (I couldn't donate with the team at the end of November based on when I last donated), I was told my hemoglobin levels were too low to donate, and that they were low enough that the nurse insisted that I talk with my doctor about getting an iron test.

Long story short, last week I got the final details from tests and it turns out that my iron is incredibly low and I am close to developing anemia. Thankfully I am now on medication to fix this problem.

If I hadn't gone to donate blood, it probably would have been a long time before this health situation was detected (and may have even progressed to anemia). The act of trying to donate blood actually helped me become healthier, and to me that is a great outcome.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PILOT

- Small number of participants and survey respondents.
- Limited language accessibility reduced participation among lower-English-proficiency clients.

CONCLUSIONS

This pilot suggests that group-based blood donation can be a meaningful, feasible, and positively experienced community activity for newcomers. Participants reported increased connection, strong motivation to continue volunteering, and a sense of pride in contributing to their community.

The pilot also highlighted that racialized communities may face additional cultural barriers to participation. Despite structural and logistical barriers, the overall outcomes support further exploration and refinement of this model.

RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Based on the pilot findings, the following steps are recommended:

- Repeat the initiative with earlier and broader outreach to increase participation.
- Foster informed and inclusive participation. Equip newcomers with clear guidance to address misinformation and eligibility questions, reduce cultural barriers to participation, and prepare staff to support engagement through targeted training and learning opportunities.
- Explore options to improve language accessibility in collaboration with Canadian Blood Services.
- Consider childcare-supportive approaches to reduce family participation barriers.
- Strengthen evaluation by increasing survey completion rates and collecting relevant demographic context.
- Share findings with the wider community to foster learning, collaboration, and adoption of best practices.



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GVLIP Resources