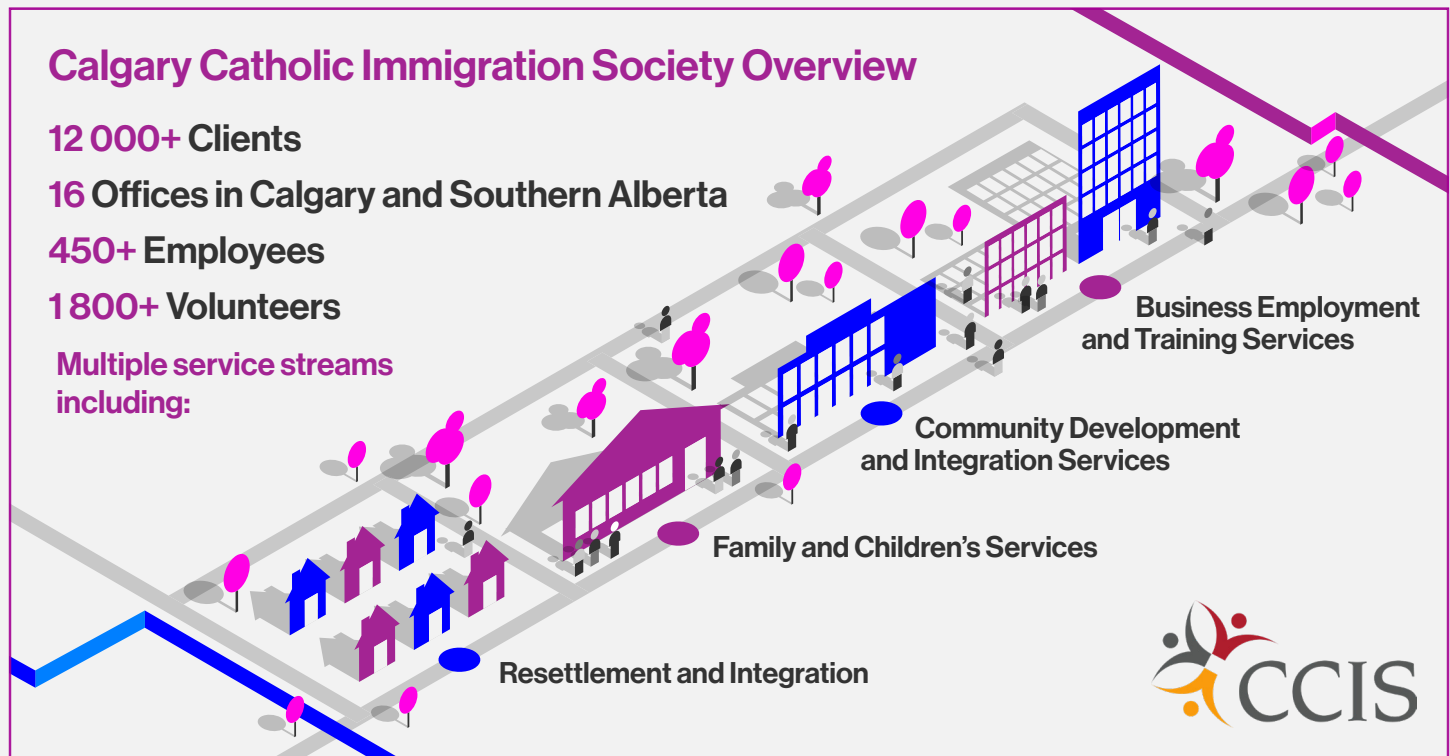**Blueprint**

Building Data Capacity in the Frontline Settlement Services:

Case Study

In May 2021, **Calgary Catholic Immigration Society** (CCIS) joined the **Practitioner Data Initiative** (PDI). Their goals were to increase capacity to collect and analyze data in a streamlined and culturally safe manner, and to leverage data and insights to inform program development, provide better services and advocate for newcomers.

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About CCIS

Since 1981, CCIS has been a sector leader in the delivery of settlement services for newcomers to Canada. Each year, they serve over 12 000 clients in Southern Alberta with the goal of creating an inclusive society where all newcomers can reach their full potential by successfully integrating into Canada.

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society Overview

12 000+ Clients

16 Offices in Calgary and Southern Alberta

450+ Employees

1 800+ Volunteers

Multiple service streams including:

Business Employment and Training Services

Community Development and Integration Services

Family and Children's Services

Resettlement and Integration

CCIS delivers a breadth of integrated services to support newcomers in their settlement journey. For example, newcomers often need support with employment along with other services including language training, housing and mental health supports. Given that successful immigration is a complex, multi-faceted process, newcomer outcomes within skills programs are likely to improve when needs in other areas of their settlement journey are simultaneously addressed. Harnessing program data is key to designing, delivering, and improving these holistic services, which in turn drives greater social impact by ensuring the right people get the right services at the right time.

What is the Practitioner Data Initiative (PDI)?

PDI is a pan-Canadian initiative that combines Blueprint's expert consultation and strategic support with a one-time financial investment of $100-200K from the Future Skills Centre (FSC).

PDI responds to the challenges nonprofits face in harnessing the power of their own data to improve their services and impact. As part of PDI, Blueprint marries financial investment with trusted and technology-neutral advice grounded in deep expertise with program data, technology solutions and nonprofit service delivery.

Through a series of collaborative workshops and capacity-building activities, PDI:

- Articulates an organization's goals for data storytelling and how their data collection is tied to outcomes and impact
- Assesses an organization's current data capacity, with a review of processes, technologies and skills, culminating in a roadmap for improving data capacity
- Provides ongoing coaching and support as the implementation of the roadmap begins

PDI engagements last 12-24 months with opportunities to participate in peer learning events with other PDI partners.

Challenges

When CCIS joined PDI, they were facing a set of common, interconnected challenges for an organization of their size and maturity:

- **Siloed client and operational data across the organization in unlinked data systems and spreadsheets.** This made it difficult for CCIS to understand how clients accessed and moved through their services and prevented easily viewing organizational metrics to support decision making.

- **Lack of momentum for data work.** Building data capacity requires upfront work that does not immediately benefit staff in their daily work, and not all were convinced that the effort required for some data projects was worth it.

- **Varying levels of staff interest and ability to use data and technical tools.** Much of CCIS's focus is on data collection to meet funder requirements with limited use to measure and improve existing services, processes and decision making.

"I worked closely with the PDI Team, especially at the beginning, and it was vitally important. Because I am one staff … it was important to have a sounding board … and the guidance."

– Rami Alhaddad, Data Analyst

"PDI allowed us to do a lot of things … The non-prescriptive nature of the financial investment … That's key."

– Amanda Koyama, Director of Strategic Engagement

Impact of PDI

With PDI's flexible funding and strategic support, CCIS was able to devote the time, resources and staff to coordinate efforts across the organization and improve communication with internal stakeholders. CCIS also used their funding to create a role dedicated to improving data processes, infrastructure and reporting. This has led to:

- **Improvements in data culture** by increasing accessibility to data for decision-making and advancing monitoring through tailored, user-friendly dashboards.
  - After helping service delivery staff identify their data needs, a series of dashboards were created to increase visibility to reliable real-time data. This improved the efficiency of their services—just as an influx of Afghan arrivals increased the demand for CCIS services.
  - Through the integration of existing but disconnected organizational data sets, CCIS leveraged existing infrastructure to provide access to consolidated organizational information through dashboards on SharePoint sites to support rapid and ongoing decision making among leadership.

- **The procurement and implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) system** that will support further data integration and access across the organization, while improving the security of their data holdings.

Enabling better knowledge mobilization to better serve newcomers

With their increased data capacity, CCIS can better mobilize data to support their clients, partners and sector by:

- **Reducing burden on clients** by mobilizing existing program data for research. CCIS shared existing program data with researchers to reduce the burden on newcomers who already share their data with many institutions, which sometimes includes reliving painful or traumatic memories.

- **Consolidating knowledge about refugees and immigrants in Alberta** by making it easily available to community practitioners and researchers. CCIS launched the [Newcomer Research Library](#), which gathers community-based knowledge, promising practices and academic research in one place for anyone to access.

What's Next?

As CCIS completes its PDI engagement, their team has the momentum and organizational buy-in to continue to advance their roadmap. Specifically, CCIS will continue:

- **Growing data literacy** within their organization
- **Consolidating data** with the ongoing development of their CRM and other infrastructure
- **Leveraging data** to continuously improve their services

Sustainability

CCIS feels confident that their work on data capacity has reached a point where they can reliably fund these capacities going forward. Through PDI, the already tangible benefits have created buy-in across the organization for data capacity. With this internal support, CCIS is better able to convince funders of the value of this work.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges. To learn more about how Blueprint is helping to build data capacity among frontline nonprofits across Canada, visit: www.blueprint-ade.ca. To learn more about the Future Skills Centre, a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development, visit www.fsc-ccf.ca.

Future Skills Centre — Centre des **Compétences futures**

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