

Design by Doing 2.0

Bhutanese Employment Lab



About the Project

EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) is engaging communities to take action to end poverty. One such action is co-designing solutions to address employment challenges among Bhutanese newcomers to the city. Since 2018, the Bhutanese community with EPE, Skills Society, the MCHB Coop and the City of Edmonton created prototypes that aim to support the attainment of gainful employment.



Part of the Road Map

The five-year Road Map is a community plan that builds on the EPE Strategy. It will activate actions towards fulfilling the vision of ending poverty within a generation.

The creation of a “Design by Doing” action lab to catalyze grassroots community-led projects is Action #34 in the Roadmap. The goal of this action is to change the conversation and build a movement to end poverty in Edmonton.



Why focus on this Community?

The newcomer population in Edmonton is diverse. While there are settlement and employment supports available for newcomers, they may not be responsive for smaller immigrant and refugee communities who face multiple barriers such as limited English Language skills, limited education, and complex socio-economic challenges. The Bhutanese community is one such community. Despite demonstrating tremendous resilience, cultural wealth, and hopeful optimism that their lives will be better in their new homeland, the 350 members living in Edmonton, find current systems and supports often do not adequately support them in overcoming the multi-faceted barriers to employment they face.



Why are there Bhutanese Refugees?

These Bhutanese people are the former citizens of a tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, bordered between India and China. In the 1980s, a policy of ethnic cleansing was implemented by the then Royal Government of Bhutan that resulted in more than 105,000 people of Nepali ethnicity fleeing the country in refugee camps in Nepal since the early 1990s and later resettled by the UNCHR across the world.

With no hope to repatriate to their homeland, the Bhutanese refugees who chose Edmonton as their new home in Canada came with hopes of a better life amidst the trauma and persistent hardships that they have experienced for almost two decades. As newcomers to the city, they have aspired to build a community, bring their cultural wealth, innate talents and skills so that they find their place in their new homeland and truly belong and participate in the city’s economic and civic life.

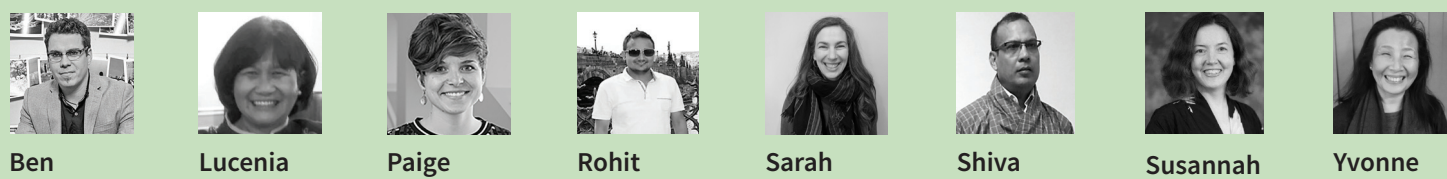


Who is Involved in this Project?

Over forty people attended the lab workshops including: Bhutanese community members with lived experience of employment challenges, front-line service deliverers, service designers, and staff of numerous organizations including the City of Edmonton, the Government of Alberta, Multicultural Health Brokers, Cultural Connections Institute, University of Alberta, Catholic Social Services, and Norquest College.



Stewardship Team



What was the Process?



1 Initial Research

Pre-lab workshops took place over the course of 6 months. During these workshops the stewardship group researched, explored, and worked alongside Bhutanese community leaders to scope the challenge area. After a great deal of discussion and learning, employment was selected as the core challenge area.

2 Co-Designing our Process

A period of learning took place, during which the stewardship team learned from the Bhutanese community leaders how their community generally approaches problem solving in their cultural context. Allowing this information to guide us, and drawing on human centered design principles, we worked alongside the Bhutanese community leaders to co-create culturally sensitive lab tools and processes.

3 Generate, Refine, Test

Following a human centered design process, members of the Bhutanese community, leaders of nonprofits, and service providers came together to explore the challenges of employment. After the 2 day workshop, those who confirmed they wanted to keep refining and working on prototypes to transform them into potential pilots, came together for a prototype refining and upgrading workshop.



The Result: 3 Prototypes

PROTOTYPE

1

Supplemental English Language Learning for Employment

PROTOTYPE

2

Supported Micro-Enterprise

PROTOTYPE

3

Community-Led Employment Brokering

The three prototypes reflect the multiple challenges the community experiences in seeking employment. Co-designed with the Bhutanese community, the prototypes demonstrate how to build on community strengths and talents to fulfill their aspirations for a productive and secure future in their new homeland.

Finding Solutions Together

Often governments, and community organizations try to create solutions FOR communities rather than WITH real input and feedback from communities.



What is a Prototype?

Prototyping is making ideas visual and tangible. A prototype is a low cost version of an idea that can be tested, tweaked and made better with feedback. A prototype could be a product, a service, a program, a policy, a system, a movement, a role, or an interaction.



What We've Learned

The pathway to successful integration of marginalized newcomer communities starts with building culturally responsive supports for gainful employment and livelihood. For these communities, many barriers exist both before and after employment is found.

Barriers to Employment for Marginalized Newcomer Communities

Pre-Employment

- Language Barriers
- Limited understanding of Canadian employment practices
- Prior learning skills

Employment

- Limited knowledge of Canadian workplace culture and practices
- The need to “fit in”

Self Employment

- Difficulty in navigating the Canadian business environment
- Limited access to capital



Desired Outcome

A Supported Journey to Gainful Employment and Economic Integration for the Bhutanese Community in Edmonton

