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My grandparents immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands in the 1950s. They wanted to start a new life in a new country with new opportunities. They started with few possessions and meagre savings. Their family, already a fleet of twelve, moved into small farm house with relatives in Southwestern Ontario. My grandmother and her siblings struggled to learn English, became accustomed to Canadian life, and picked tomatoes for hours in the fields to help ease the burden of farming. Three generations later, my Dutch family has settled into their new home with their children and grandchildren. At the time, they were immigrants – but not anymore.

The same could be said of my mother's family. My great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandparents (rough estimation) immigrated to Canada from France in the 1600s. They wanted to start a new life in a new country with new opportunities. They started with few possessions and meagre savings. They struggled to sow crops and grow food in the harsh winters and rocky earth of Québec. Centuries later, my French-Canadian family has settled into their new home with their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so forth. At the time, they were immigrants – but not anymore.

In fact, all non-indigenous Canadians are immigrants; some just arrived more recently than others. It's a nuance that's not always realized because the immigration discourse is saturated with negative stereotypes and extreme cases that inspire fear into the hearts of communities... a fear that stems from change, uncertainty and differences. Will they speak my language? Will they share my values? Will our community be different?

Welcoming America is not afraid. On the contrary, Welcoming America understands that "immigrants" are simply the newest residents in a land constantly receiving immigrants, and they want to ensure a welcoming environment for everyone in the community.

David Lubell, founder and Executive Director of Welcoming America, compares the process of creating welcoming communities for newcomers to watering a seed. "If you want a seed to grow in a garden, you can't just water it." Of course, water is necessary for the seed to grow. Resettlement services, language classes and job training are all vital to the growth and successful integration of immigrants, but it doesn't stop there.

"Welcoming America started almost exclusively looking at the soil instead. 'How do we change the soil to ensure that it's fertile?'" As such, Welcoming America offers services that help communities address the soil through communication and direct contacts between residents and newcomers to ensure the growth of the seed. Welcoming America tackles hostility and fear of immigrants and refugees simultaneously from both a top-down and bottom-up approach. At the



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local level, they facilitate and train community leaders to lead initiatives that provide a space for dialogue and exchange. At the institutional level, Welcoming America helps municipal governments and local non-profit organizations identify social and infrastructural barriers that prevent newcomers from fully integrating.

According to Lubell, the best way to reshape the discourse and expel negative stereotypes about immigrants is through contact. Welcoming America has a three-pronged approach to fostering welcoming communities. “All three of these prongs are important, although I would argue that contact is the most transformational [...]” Lubell recounts how fulfilling it is to see someone speak openly with a newcomer, and to see the light that goes on in their eyes when they realize that they share common values despite differences in language and culture. Through contact, Welcoming America hopes to change the way Americans see immigrants by breaking the ice and starting a conversation. So far, its methodology has inspired 102 local governments, 117 non-profit organizations and one certified Welcoming City to become a part of Welcoming America’s national network.

Generations from now, how will the grand-children of today’s newcomers tell the story of their grand-parents’ immigration? Will it be a story of community strength and resilience? Welcoming America is taking a step to shape the narrative of immigrants so that one day, newcomers’ stories will sound more like this: “We wanted to start a new life in a new country with new opportunities. We started with few possessions and meagre savings. Fortunately, our community welcomed us with open arms. It wasn’t easy, but through community outreach, language training, job-search workshops, and immigrant-friendly policies, our family was given the tools to settle into our new home. At the time, we were immigrants – but not anymore. Now we’re part of the community.”