CAREER PATHWAYS FOR
VISIBLE MINORITY
NEWCOMER WOMEN



Photovoice in Newcomer Women's Employment Programs:

Understanding the Program Experience from Participants' Views

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SRDC SRSA SINCE 1991 DEPUIS
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acces
isans Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
MOSAIC
OFE Opportunities for Employment
SEO Société économique de l'Ontario
achēv
WORLD SKILLS Employment Centre d'emploi Compétences mondiales
YWCA Metro Vancouver

Images contribute to how we see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world, and what we perceive as significant or different. The lesson an image teaches does not reside in its physical structure, but rather in how people interpret the image in question. ***Carolyn C. Wang, (2006)***[1]

[1] Carolyn C. Wang, Photovoice Creator/Researcher Wang, C.C. (2006). Youth participation in Photovoice as a strategy for community change. Journal of Community Practice, 14(1/2), 147-161.

The Importance of Pictures & Stories

Pictures and images have been used for thousands of years to tell stories, to document events and convey messages to audiences. In using images to tell a story, the process begins with an individual reflecting on the narrative they want to tell and intentionally creating images to achieve this. The audience reflects on these images and the story being told to understand and interpret what they see to make it meaningful.

What is photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology pioneered by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in the early 1990s when they were working in China as part of a women's health project. It has subsequently been used across the world with diverse groups from newcomer women in Canada, to marginal youth, aging and immigrant seniors, people with HIV and AIDS and many others. Photovoice overcomes language and communication barriers that can prevent individuals from expressing themselves, especially in relation to complex, personal or sensitive topics.

Photovoice has three main goals:

1. To enable people to record and reflect on their community strengths and concerns;
2. To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about community issues and their impact on individuals through large and small group discussions of photographs; and
3. To reach policy-makers and decision-makers to bring about change.

In Photovoice projects, participants are given cameras; they are acknowledged as the experts within the research context (Pearce et. Al, 2016). Participants control the photos they take and those that they choose to share. As they share the photo, participants reflect on what it represents to them. A researcher facilitates a group discussion to explore what other participants see and what the photo represents to them. Through this collaborative interpretation, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issues important to the group develop.

"Photovoice's added benefit … is the fact that the community's difficulties are presented through the "lens" of the one who encounters them, so the messages become more complex, with "attached" emotions, transmitting exactly the problem in its essence, as it is felt by community members, in order to develop public policies focused on solving specific problems." [2]

[2] Velea, S., and Alexeandru, M., A guide to facilitate PhotoVoice Projects, p3. ANPCDEFP, https://www.anpcdefp.ro/library/Rapoarte%20%C8%99i%20analize/Ghiduri_CONNECTOR_2017/Ghid%20Photovoice_EN.pdf

Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot Project & Photovoice

This Photovoice project is part of the evaluation of the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women (CPVMNW) pilot project. The aim of the Photovoice project was to explore the experiences of the women as they participated in the women's employment programs and settled in Canada.

CPVMNW was designed to implement and evaluate four models aimed at addressing the needs of visible minority newcomer women in their integration with the Canadian labour market. The overall goal of each model is to help visible minority newcomer women to successfully transition to the labour market. The models differ by target population (e.g., different skills/language levels) and by program activities. Initially, all four models were designed to be offered in-person; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all services were converted to virtual or remote provision.

CPVMNW is delivered by eight service provider organizations across Canada implementing 11 interventions based on the four models: ACCES Employment, Achēv, ISANS, La Société économique de l'Ontario, MOSAIC, Opportunities for Employment, World Skills Employment Centre, and the YWCA Metro Vancouver. Four key objectives for the evaluation are:

1. Gather evidence on effective ways to facilitate the transition of visible minority newcomer women into the Canadian labour market;

2. Establish what are promising practices for the labour market integration of visible minority newcomer women with different skill levels and varying distance from the labour market;

3. Test and identify opportunities for scaling up promising interventions nationally; and

4. Share and disseminate findings, best practices, and lessons learned among the settlement and employment sectors and policy-makers.

Photovoice Participants

In February 2021, ten newcomers were recruited to participate in a Photovoice project. The women were participating in CPVMNW programs. They had all moved to Canada within the last five years and lived in different locations across the country. Participants came from nine different countries — Brazil, China, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Qatar, South Africa and South Korea. Participants had a mix of work experiences and skills but most sought to find skilled employment.

The Photovoice project took place in March 2021. All participants completed consent forms, photo release forms and received an honorarium for their participation.

Overview of Photovoice Process

Given the diversity of Photovoice projects, there is "no single blueprint or model" as projects are customized to reflect local contexts. The COVID-19 restrictions meant the Photovoice sessions were held virtually and all communication with the participants outside these sessions was by email. The Photovoice project took place over a period of three weeks and consisted of two virtual two-and-a-half hour workshops with one including a focus group discussion. During the time between the workshops, the newcomer women took photographs and shared them with the researchers. The participants were encouraged to contact the researchers if they had any questions or required support.

Workshop 1: Participants learned about Photovoice, what it is and how it was to be used. They reviewed basic photographic techniques and the process of sharing photos, ethics of taking photos and safety issues; and they agreed to the framing questions which were to be addressed by their photos.

Photography: Participants took photos and selected three to share. Participants completed a short template to help them reflect on the photos and develop their narratives for sharing with the group. This included information about which framing question the photo was addressing, where and when the photo was taken, the title, the message they wanted to share about the photo and what was important for people to understand about this photo. Participants sent their photos and narratives to the researchers prior to the next workshop.

Workshop 2 and group discussion: Participants presented their photos and shared their stories about why they took the photo, what it represented to them and what they wanted others to know. The researchers then facilitated a group discussion about the photographs and narratives. Participants agreed on how the information would be shared with the community, policy-and decision-makers.

Framing Questions

Five framing questions were developed and agreed upon. These questions were designed to guide the reflections of the participants about their experiences as newcomers, their lives in Canada and about the employment program they participated in. The participants were asked to choose three questions and take and share photos.

1. What picture or image would you take if you were to tell a friend about the "women's program" and why they should be involved?

2. Then and now: take a photo that reflects your daily life before you were involved in the project. Take a photo of what life is like now after you have taken part in the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot Project.

3. How does employment or training, if it does, play a role in your settlement journey in Canada?

4. Take a picture about the hope you see for yourself or for your family now.

5. What picture would you take to share an important message about the women's program?

Analysis

The workshops and focus group discussion were audio recorded and transcribed. This data together with the information about the photos and narratives were analyzed thematically using NVivo 11, a qualitative data analysis software.

Main Themes

In presenting findings from this Photovoice project, every effort has been made to preserve the voices of the participants as they are the most able to articulate their own settlement stories. The analysis of the photos, the narratives shared by participants and the group discussion identified the key themes discussed below. During the focus group, as participants presented their photos, the narratives were refined through the collaborative interpretation that occurred in the discussion. There was a very high level of consensus around these themes, and they are important as they provide a broad context for the responses to the framing questions as well as allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of the newcomer women.

The key themes are presented first as they provide the reader with an understanding of the overall experiences of the newcomer women. The data is then used to answer the framing questions.

Settlement Journeys & Hope

Moving to a new country and leaving behind what is familiar takes courage. All participants talked extensively about their settlement journeys, both in terms of the actual journey from leaving their home countries and arriving in Canada and in terms of settling in Canada. For participants, their settlement journeys were sporadic. Participants needed patience and resiliency to negotiate the starts and stops, the waiting and uncertainty they encountered. Participants' settlement journeys resulted in a series of contradictory emotions — their journeys were challenging and rewarding, overwhelming and hopeful, exciting and terrifying, exhilarating and exhausting, all at the same time.
Yet despite these mixed emotions, participants remained convinced their settlement journeys would take them to a new and better life. To illustrate this hope for a better future, many participants took photos of a path or road. In explaining **Photo 1**, the participant emphasized the road not being a straight line and how it represented her settlement journey: a light at the end of the road, which represented a brighter future for her and her family. She added that although some parts of the road are covered by shadows and darkness, other parts ahead are exposed to sunlight and brightness, and the need to keep pushing on.



Photo 1: *Life's Journey*

"This is a route that has a lot of bends and curves and all that. And so eventually it still leads to where you want to go. So what it tells me is that in life there could be a lot of twists, a lot of turns. Sometimes, you feel a little bit stuck, but when you try and take the bent one, one after the other, you arrive at your destination."

While settling in Canada was challenging and participants were apprehensive about moving here, most felt welcomed and safe. They had heard positive things about Canada before they arrived including that Canadians were friendly, they welcomed newcomers and there would be support available to assist them in settling in Canada. For one participant, the deer in **Photo 2** represented the feeling of safety and being welcomed.

"... when I first saw these deer, I felt Canadian people are really friendly because the deer are not afraid of me. So it means that my neighbors won't hurt the deer ... they're not afraid. ... So this is how I feel - like Canadian people are really friendly. I can see Canada. I can witness and feel and touch everything that all becomes my own experience, just like the women's program. Before I came here, I heard that people say "you're going to get help, they are going to help you. They are welcoming of immigrants. They welcome all the immigrants here." But I didn't know what was really meant when they say that. But after I came here, I got help. I had a lovely experience with the program. I found a lot of friendly messages from the city and from everybody else in this country. So I know this is true. So it's a very impressive experience to me. So I want to use this picture to describe the lovely experience when I first came here. I was welcomed. Everybody said, "welcome to Canada" to me. So these deer, I feel they are trying to say welcome to Canada, welcome to our neighbourhood. I'm sharing this space with you."

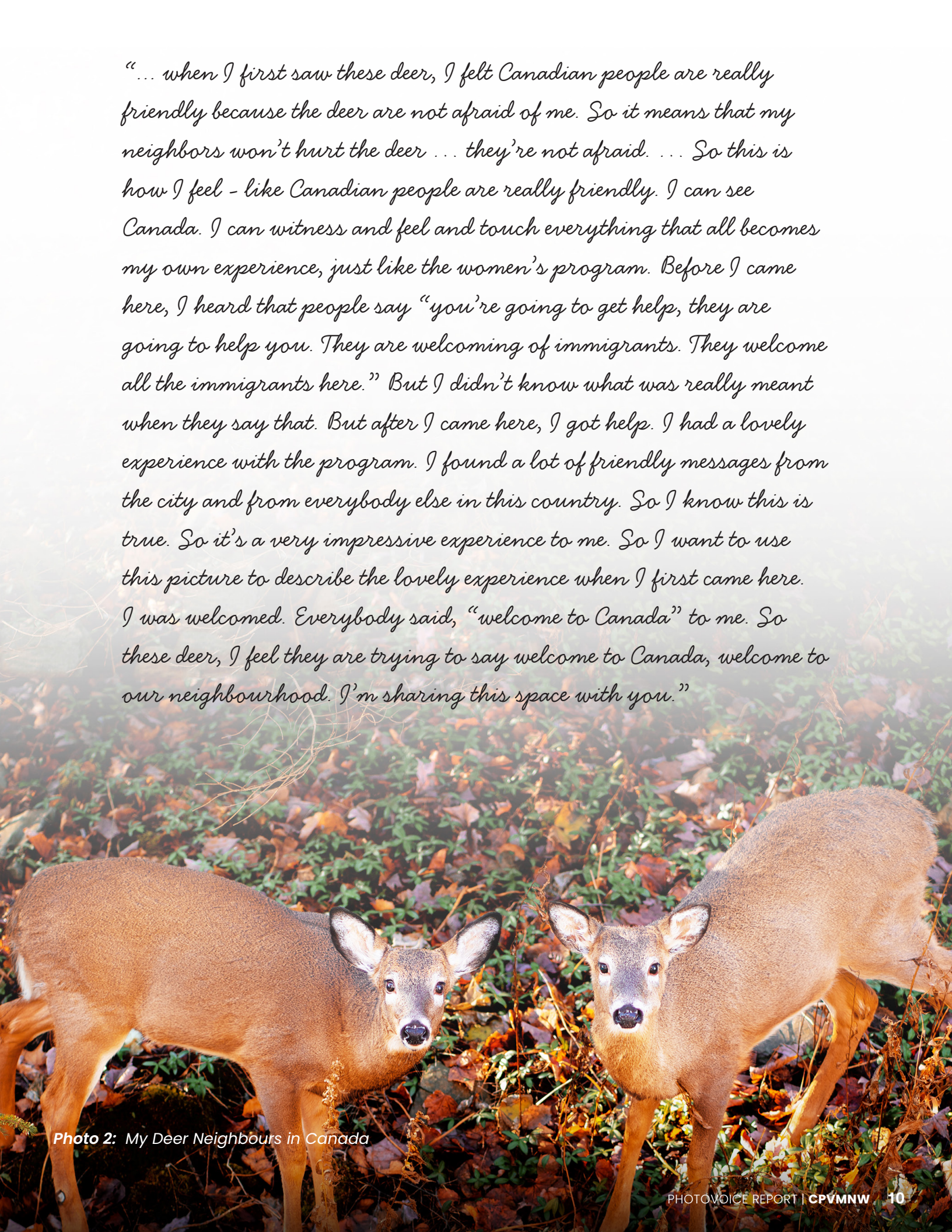

Photo 2: *My Deer Neighbours in Canada*

Adjusting to Life in Canada

Adjusting to life in Canada took time. The women faced a steep learning curve, which was even more difficult for those participants who did not speak English or French well. Everyday tasks and activities required learning how to navigate new systems and procedures, marked by trial and error. When accessing services and supports, participants worked hard to identify the various steps required to find the information they needed. For example, going to the doctor meant registering with provincial health care systems, finding a suitable health professional, and knowing how to access them including how to get there. Most participants felt that "they knew nothing" when they arrived in Canada; it took time to acquire the knowledge they needed and to feel confident about accessing services and supports. **Photo 3** represents this process of adjustment. It is a picture of a public transit card which highlighted some of the ways in which life had changed. Before coming to Canada, she had a car and would drive where she wanted to go. Now, she no longer had a car, could not drive in Canada and had to use public transportation. Getting a bus ticket represented a huge achievement. The bus ticket was important because it had the potential to lead to a "seat at the table." For participants the bus ticket represented a level of independence and the ability to access programs, attend interviews and even get to work.



Photo 3: *A Seat on the Bus Gets You a Seat at the Table*

"And essentially it spoke about my experience of networking and going out every single day ever since getting here, trying to get a foot in the door, meeting so many people in their job search, trying to convince them to give me a chance or give me a shot. And again, coming from my home country where I had my own car and I could drive perfectly fine. . . learning how to navigate a bus system like back home, like in a comprehensive bus or train system, everything requires a car. And you come to a city like Ottawa where you have a high concentration of buildings where most of the government buildings and the ability to meet somebody on their time when they want you to meet them requires a lot of effort. Especially in the wintertime when buses can be canceled or buses don't come in the typical 20-minute schedule. Anyways, it requires a lot of effort. And for me, it was a form of resilience, just never give up even on days where we were so cold and I didn't want to take the bus and I didn't want to have that meeting. I just had to force myself to go out and get what I wanted. And for me, in the end, it paid off. It took two years to get there, but it paid off. And I finally have a seat at that table. And as I say, it's just my kitchen table for now, but I'm part of the team and I'm here and I'm happy."

Participants discussed the process of adjusting to their new employment realities, which not only involved learning about new workplace cultures but also accepting the fact they had to restart their careers. The newcomer women had anticipated some of these employment challenges before arriving in Canada, but for most, addressing them was more difficult than they had imagined. The CPVMNW employment programs helped participants overcome these challenges by providing them with interview training, connecting them to mentors and giving them opportunities to network and learn about the Canadian workplace. The employment programs provided trusted sources of information and enabled newcomer women to share information with each other.

Adjusting to life in Canada also required learning to navigate new social and cultural realities. For some participants, this process resulted in high levels of self-doubt. They questioned their ability to find employment commensurate with their skills and fit into society. One participant described these self-doubts as a "transition penalty," the downside of moving to Canada and having to take several steps back in your career and learn how to fit into life in a new country. **Photo 4** is a collection of bird cages surrounded by beautiful flowers. For the photographer, the photo represented her feelings of being trapped and her fear of never being able to fly again because of the self-doubt she experienced. For her, the multiple bird cages represented other newcomer women who she knew shared these feelings. Other participants echoed these sentiments and described feeling stuck and not being able to move forward. The employment programs provided participants with supports to overcome the self-doubts and the opportunities to learn how to move forward. Participants appreciated meeting other newcomer women who shared similar challenges. They found it reassuring that they were not alone, and their fears were perfectly normal.

"I actually took this last year when I was in Montreal, so it was Canada Day last year and we had gone to Montreal for a long weekend. And we happened upon this most beautiful little flower shop in the middle of the city. And it had these little hanging bird cages there. And for me, it was a very powerful image. . . . how a perfectly healthy bird starts tow question her ability to fly if she's locked up long enough. And of course, these birdcages are surrounded by beauty and flowers. And sometimes you wouldn't necessarily know that you are trapped or you're feeling trapped. And again, the conditions could be such that you question ever wanting to leave the cage. You question even if you did leave the cage, would you be able to fly? And I think also the fact that it was multiple bird cages was representative of so many other women who were like me, who were going through the same thing, who probably felt trapped, who probably were doubting their ability to fly. So it's just something that spoke to me. And I think for this question was the one about what would you tell somebody about a women's program? And I would say that there's legitimacy in the types of feelings that you feel, because a lot of the times we don't really think about the transition penalty when you immigrate, you don't think about your feelings of self-doubt or you start to think, is there something wrong with me? Am I a weak person or why do I feel like this? I just think there's solidarity and just never doubt your ability to fly."

Photo 4: *Don't Doubt Your Ability to Fly*



Perseverance and Resilience

Throughout this Photovoice project all participants reflected on the importance of perseverance and determination to their settlement journey. They described perseverance and resilience in terms of processes rather than individual personal traits; it was something they had learned and drew upon to support their hopes for themselves and their families. The process of adjusting to life in Canada combined with the additional efforts required to overcome barriers, resulted in participants sometimes feeling overwhelmed, alone and wanting to give up. Meeting other women who were in similar situations gave them confidence to know they were not alone and that their situations would improve. An important outcome for the employment programs was they provided an opportunity for participants to meet other newcomer women and to find support. **Photo 5** is a picture of a participant's son flying his kite. She explained that before the kite was off the ground, she and her husband tried many times — continuously failing, learning and trying again — until they succeeded. The kite failing to get off the ground paralleled her feelings and experiences when she first immigrated to Canada as she did not know anything about the country or city she was in and struggling to find employment, similar to many other newcomer women.



"This is a photo of my son is flying a kite. Actually, my husband and I tried this several times, that kite, but it didn't do that. Maybe 10 or 20 times, we try and try and learning, learning. And my second baby and my son were like, "Why didn't the kite fly?" So they complained to us. But we so tried. And then finally, the kite is flying in the sky. So you are very happy at the time. And this is my life. Because we didn't know everything when I came to Vancouver. So we just try everything and then now we think we are flying in the sky or I am another eager deer. I try to live my life and to try higher and higher. So this is a message for me."

Photo 5: *My Newcomer Life*

Photo 6 is a door number, 248. In presenting this photo and narrative the participant focused on doubling of the numbers and saw it representing an upward trajectory and the potential for a new life in Canada. However, it also reminded participants most things required double the effort compared to their previous life. They saw the reason for this being related to "structural conditions which were beyond their control." For example, finding employment took longer, qualifications were not recognized, and the application and interview process were different. Despite the greater effort required, the participants hoped the sequence of numbers, 248, represented the exponential success they could achieve.

"Everything here is double the effort than it would have been back home. However slow progress is still progress. I look at these numbers as a constant reminder that all these efforts are not futile. Two 2's become 4, and two 4's become 8. My efforts will either lead to exponential success, or it could take me twice as long to get to where I want to be, but I will get there if I have the hope in me to keep trying."

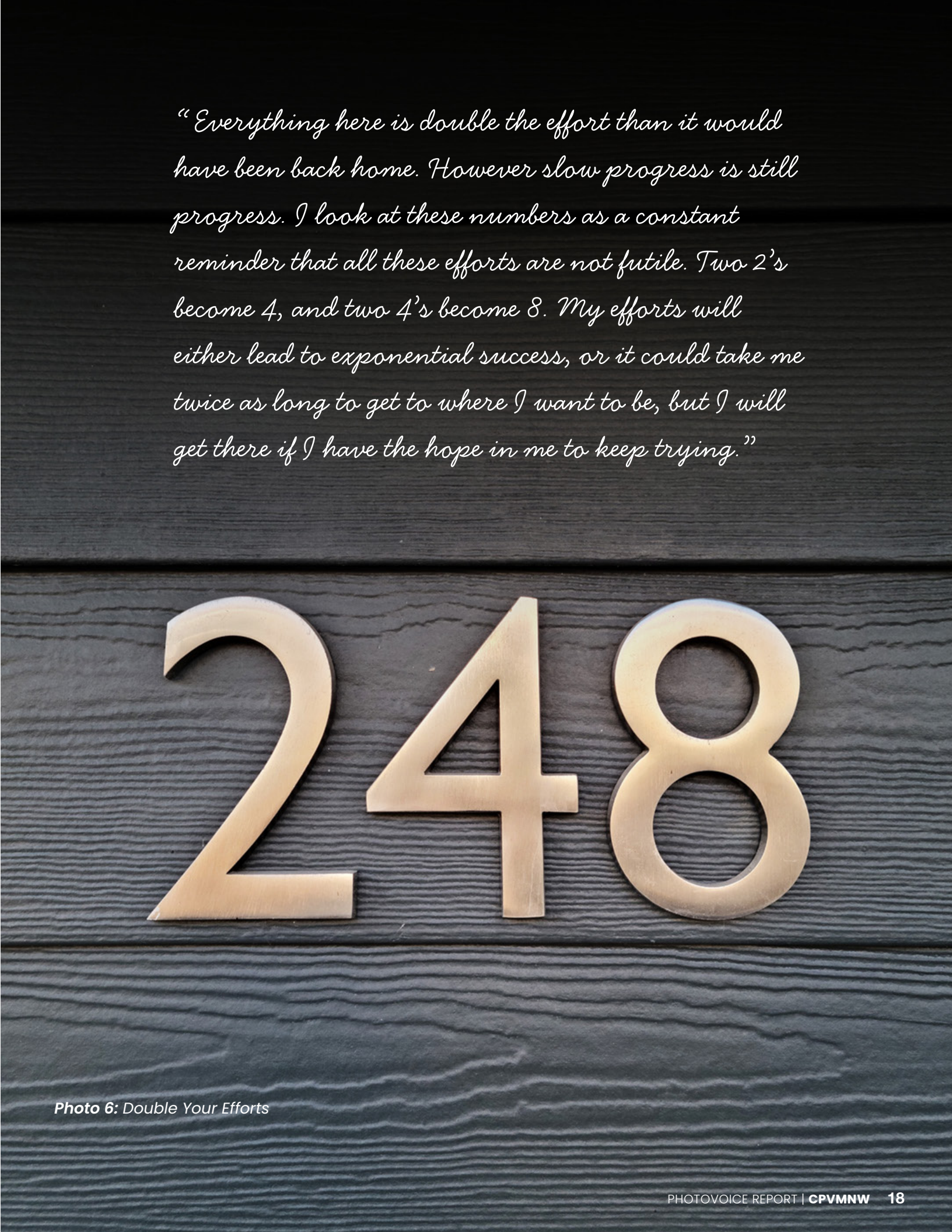

Photo 6: *Double Your Efforts*

The Ripple Effect — Message for Program-and Policy-makers

The photos, narratives and the focus group discussion stressed how the supports in the CPVMNW employment programs extended beyond helping participants find work. The ripple effects of programs were appreciated by participants who agreed the programs increased their confidence, provided a sense of community, and gave them transferrable skills that they could use to help overcome other barriers. For example, the programs provided newcomers with an opportunity to practice their language skills and enabled them to connect with other newcomers in the program and to feel part of their local communities. Being able to communicate more with those around them increased their confidence and their sense of belonging. While participants stressed the importance of the employment skills they received, an equally important component of the program was the wider support they offered to newcomers. **Photo 7** shows an elder in a historic village in Canada hand weaving lace. For the participant, this represented the interconnectedness of all aspects of their lives. The participant explained that for many newcomers learning was a hard, slow process but as long as they were moving forward one step at a time, similar to weaving one section at a time, she would succeed. The individual threads connect all their learnings and experience so that nothing exists in isolation. This image and the narrative resonated strongly with participants who stressed that the impact of the employment program extended beyond finding work. The skills participants learned, the support they received, the connections they made and the confidence and hope they developed transferred to other parts of their lives and help them settle and adjust to life in Canada.



Photo 7: *Lace Making*

"And this is the story that a woman was using all these threads to hand make weaving a lace. So it's very traditional way or an ancient way of making lace. And I answered the third question from the list, how does employment or training [have a role] in my settlement? So I feel. . . I counted and there are more than 50 threads that all weave together to make lace. So it means that . . . when I just came here, everything was overwhelming. I feel there's a lot of things that I need to learn. I need to learn how to pay tax, how to drive here. What is the driving rules here? How to pay rent, how to set a bank account, how to pay for my utility bills, everything I need to learn, including all the things that I need to learn in work environment. And I think most important is how I need to connect to people, how I need to participate in the society. So everything I need to learn feels like a thread that all put together to form a lace so that if I do things right, if I learn all things together, experience things together at the same time, they will all weave together and form a beautiful pattern. And this pattern will keep going and going with my journey living here. And I'm learning all the way through this journey. So I feel I cannot learn or I cannot weave lace in a very short time. I need to learn from the beginning to the end. Maybe I'll always be learning. After maybe twenty years, I'll still be learning. So this is a slow process. But as long as I get something learned, as long as I absorb some knowledge or information, I could have a short little part of the lace finished."

Photovoice and Framing Questions

The themes discussed above provide the reader with a broad understanding of the participants' settlement journeys. The following section explores participants' experiences of the CPVMNW employment programs and illustrate how these programs not only helped them find work but supported them in adjusting to life in Canada.

Framing Question 1: What picture or image would you take if you were to tell a friend about the "women's program" and why they should be involved?

The photos and the discussion about the employment programs were extremely positive. The messages participants wanted to share with other newcomer women centred on how instrumental the programs were in helping them to adjust to life in Canada, grow their confidence and increase their employment seeking skills. Key messages participants wanted friends to know about the employment programs included hope, practical supports and a sense of community. Participants described the program as providing a pathway to employment and to a better life. They wanted other newcomer women to know they were not alone and help was available.



Photo 8: *Solidarity*

"And this is how I thought also about the women in the program, because sometimes we've had days where we felt hopeless and our conditions are very difficult and we did not know how it will improve. But we found a path. And this path helped us to grow and to improve and to get a better life for ourselves. And this is through the program. So the program was our path just like the railing was the path for this tree to grow and improve."

"And what it helped was with women, it helped them to shine that rainbow within, to bring out those colours in us and with the help of that sunshine and reflect all the brightness into our lives and to give us direction. And show us what skills we had, whether it was soft skills or those transferable skills, we can apply to the market here and make it relevant – a major for us here in the new country and new home. So that's how it relates [to] the women's program. And that's the message I want to give other women, that this program is really helpful. It will help you shine your skills and to make it marketable in the current market of North America, Canada."



Photo 9: *Magnitude of the Women's Program*

Framing Question 2: Then and Now — take a photo that reflects your daily life before you were involved in the project. Take a photo of what life is like now after you have taken part in the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot Project.

The participants focused on the positive changes they had experienced since coming to Canada. For those participants who came to Canada as refugees, having a home, a place of their own and a job transformed their lives. The employment program helped participants find work which enabled them to find a home.

Photo 10: *Door to Settlement*



Before coming to Canada this participant had been a refugee for several years.

"And during all this time, I was not able to afford to rent my own place to have my private place for myself only. I was always sharing like a room in a house with other people. And with employment, last year in July, I was able to start to get some more income. I was able to save money and I was able to afford to pay rent for my own place instead of sharing with other people. It might look like just a simple door. But behind this door, there is everything that I need to have a better life"

Framing Question 3: How does employment or training, if it does, play a role in your settlement journey in Canada?

Employment and training played an important role in the participants' settlement journeys as it provided a way for them to move forward and establish themselves in Canada. Being employed was important to participants as it was part of their identities, just as it was also important to earn a salary and pay bills. Finding work was an important piece of the settlement jigsaw as it was a gateway to feeling part of the community.



Photo 11: *Important Bridges*

"So I took a picture of a bridge which connects me from where I am, or connects people from where they are to where they want to be or where they ought to be. I remember when we started the program, a lot of people, a lot of the women had come because they were stuck in their job search. A lot of people have sent in applications and all that, and they weren't just getting anywhere with them. And then we did the program and then, of course, I am employed today. The bridge is like you're connected to the right people, we're connected to mentors. We're able to redo our CVs. We're given training on how to do interviews or how to go for interviews and how to answer the questions. And so this picture is just everything about the program. So it has helped connect a lot of us from where we were to where we wanted to be. So that's how I see the program."

Framing Question 4: Take a picture about the hope you see for yourself or for your family now.

The participants were very hopeful for themselves and their families, in that they would have a good future and thrive in Canada. This hope persisted despite some challenges and difficulties encountered. Small things like getting a transit pass, updating a resume, meeting other newcomer women like themselves, gave them a sense of progress and this kept their hope alive.

"I think it's the early morning when I was going on my morning walk. . . . That's actually if you could click on the picture, the whole view is from the afar. It shows a path and those trees and those sun rays straining through those trees, so that way it can answer that question of hope for me and my family in Canada. So I take every day as it comes. I do see the positive from the day to leave behind the darkness and to see the sunshine spreading through our lives and digging and moving towards that bright or fresh perspective each day. So that's how I see hope, changing and adapting to the circumstances, moving out of that darkness towards the sun. So this pandemic, which has been very dull and very dark for all of us in different phases, be it a newcomer in the country or even those who've been here for a very long time. . ."

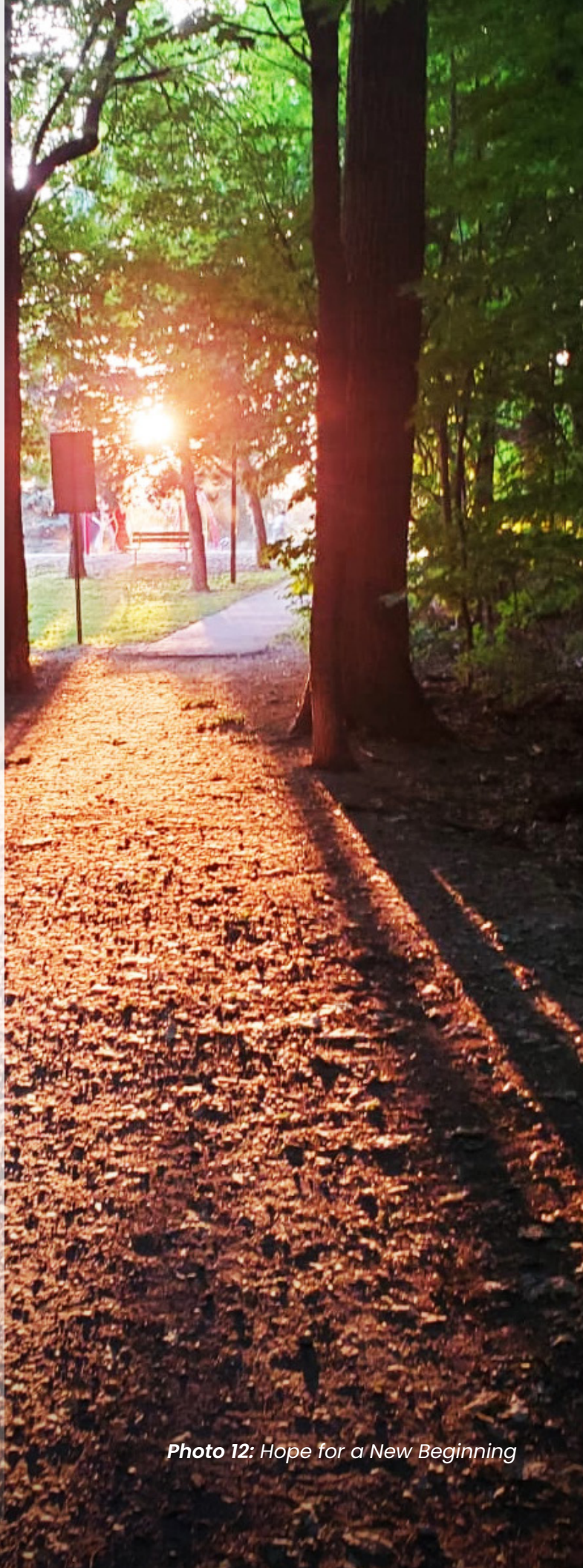

Photo 12: *Hope for a New Beginning*

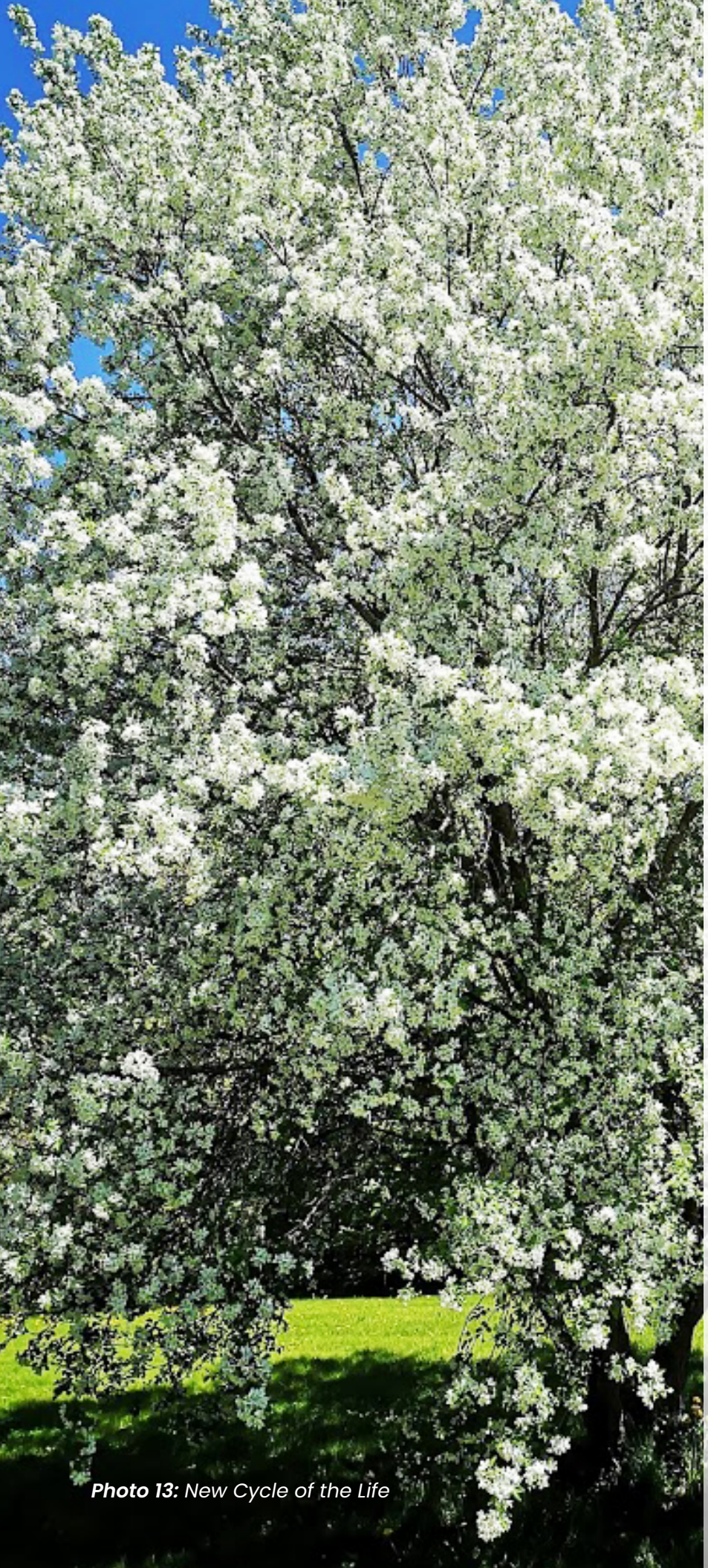

Photo 13: *New Cycle of the Life*

This flowering tree represented the hope and the belief for good things to come. The participant described the image as representing the various stages of her own development in the program, from the start to the end of the program. She shared that she was laid off when she took the photo of the tree. Although this was a sad time in her life, the tree portrays hope, beauty and good things to come in her life because of the program, symbolized by the bloomed flowers.

"I want to tell a friend about this women's program, why they should be involved. It is because when I started the program, I kind of felt not myself. . . .But also there's hope, right? New things coming also. And I think for every woman, I was just thinking that this is a picture that I want to involve and tell all my friends that this is beautiful. It's a very good program and I feel like this expresses very well what I was feeling when I started the program, and also, when I finished. This picture shows everything – the hope. And the fruits after, the flowers. And it's a good. . . bringing color in your life, I think. A new hope, a new journey. It's like a cycle of our life."

Framing Question 5: What picture would you take to share an important message about the women's program?

Participants wanted other newcomer women to know they were not alone and help was available. This picture of the different coloured hands holding each other was taken by a participant who explained that when she joined the program, she felt well accepted, supported, and understood by both the program staff and the other women. A couple of participants described that by believing and supporting each other throughout the program, a bigger change can be made to help improve the livelihood of newcomer women in Canada. **Photo 14** was entitled 'unity in diversity' and shows a circle of interconnected hands all of which are different colours. Participants stressed that despite their different cultures, professions, ages, etc., the circle of hands represented the strength that women could draw from each other and showed they were stronger together, when they shared their experiences, their knowledge and their support. Upon reflection, another participant shared, ***"I like the way the hands form a circle because it shows that it's continuous, it's not just a one off thing, especially when you look at racism in today's world, issues that we're stronger together and it's continuous, not just the one or not just the particular period. It has to be continuous."***

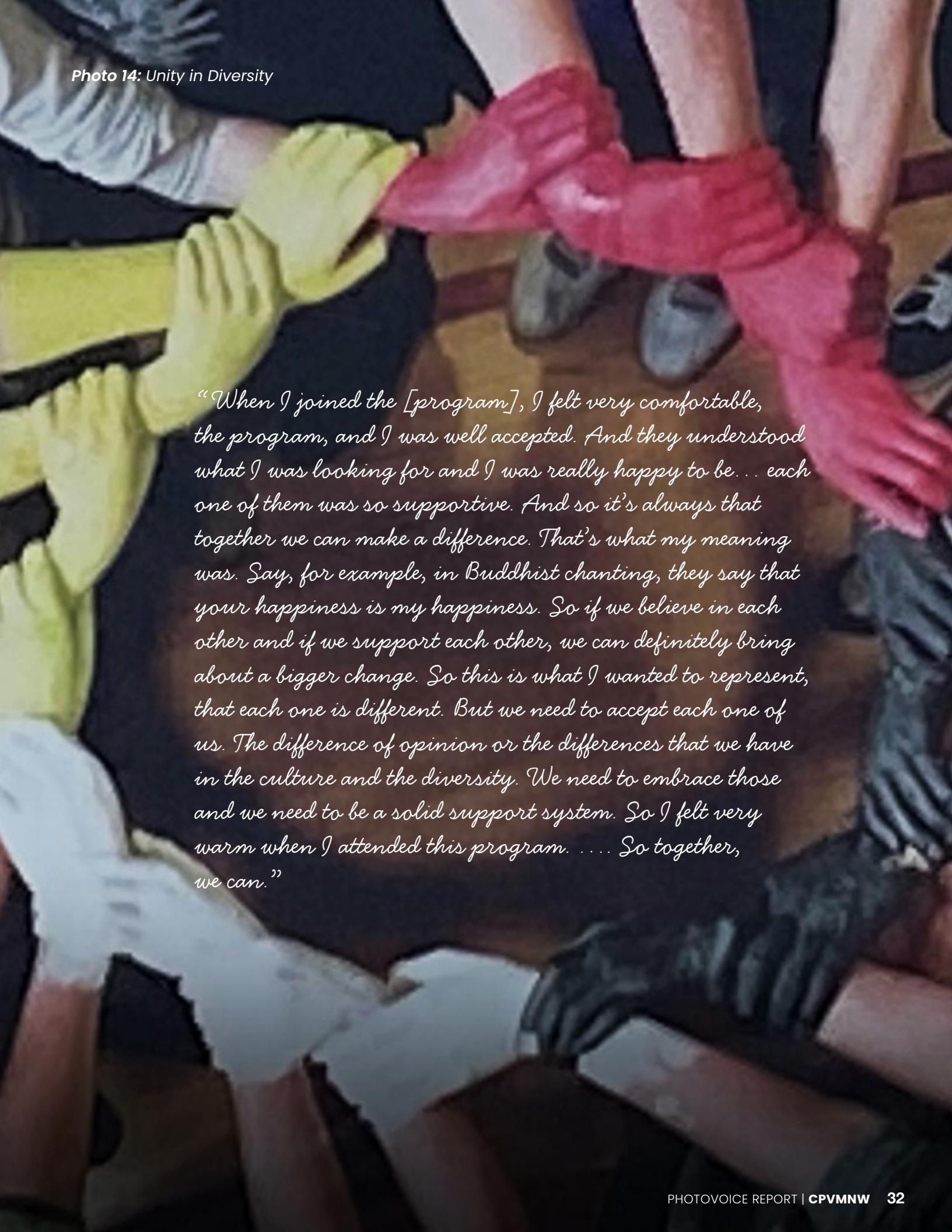

Photo 14: *Unity in Diversity*

"When I joined the [program], I felt very comfortable, the program, and I was well accepted. And they understood what I was looking for and I was really happy to be. . . each one of them was so supportive. And so it's always that together we can make a difference. That's what my meaning was. Say, for example, in Buddhist chanting, they say that your happiness is my happiness. So if we believe in each other and if we support each other, we can definitely bring about a bigger change. So this is what I wanted to represent, that each one is different. But we need to accept each one of us. The difference of opinion or the differences that we have in the culture and the diversity. We need to embrace those and we need to be a solid support system. So I felt very warm when I attended this program. . . . So together, we can."

Photovoice Experience

After all participants had the opportunity to describe their photos and experiences in the program, they were asked to reflect on the Photovoice experience. Overall, participants enjoyed being a part of the Photovoice project. Many participants were able to connect with other participants' photos and stories as participants' immigration experiences, hardships looking for employment and the achievements of finding employment strongly resonated with them. Participants noted that although each of their experiences migrating to Canada and looking for employment is unique, they share similar feelings of wanting to be successful in Canada, the desire to provide the best lives for their families, all the while longing for their families and lives back home. One participant reported that through the Photovoice experience, they understood that they were not alone:

"And before this, you would think that you are alone, that you are the only person that is feeling this way. But when you see others, you feel like you are part of something that everyone is the same, same like you. You have something in common. You are not different. You are not alone."

The Photovoice project also provided unique opportunities for participants to reflect on their settlement journeys through actively thinking about the photos and thinking about the messages other participants were trying to convey. One participant eloquently explained:

"[…] the way we're explaining it to each other is not necessarily the way we would explain it to our families back home or to people that we meet or new friends. And there are so few safe spaces in which you can absolutely be honest about your feelings and find that solidarity. So I think for me that that it was… it felt very therapeutic."

Others reflected on how strong and resilient each and every one of them truly were through participating in the Photovoice project. One participant shared that she was proud of herself and other participants in the group, as she recognized the different journeys that newcomer women have in finding employment compared to individuals who were born and raised in Canada. She explained, ***"I can see everyone here have a different story, but similar challenges and the same things that we also building our history or story."***

Another participant reported that she appreciated and enjoyed hearing about the stories that belonged with each photo, and how a photo as simple as a door had a powerful story behind it. She shared that her takeaway from participating in the Photovoice project was, ***"So next when I look at somebody, I'll try to relate it to what's going on in my life. And similarly, with somebody else who was with me, how we can relate things together."***

Lessons from the Photovoice Project

The photos, narratives and discussion about the employment programs for CPVMNW demonstrate that while the aim of the programs was employment, for participants, the programs were "more than that." While the programs provided a pathway to employment, the "more than that" added value to the programs and made them invaluable to and appreciated by participants. The word cloud shown in Figure 1 below identifies what participants meant by "more than that" and included a sense of solidarity, that they were not alone, they were resilient, and they had hope for the future. Although most of the features identified were intangible, they were deemed essential as they enabled participants to keep going and to achieve their employment and other goals. The advice to program managers and developers from this Photovoice project is these need to be included in the programming.

Figure 1: The Additional Value in Employment Programming for Newcomer Women

