



**Hamilton Training Advisory Board**

Commission consultative sur la formation à Hamilton

**Welcome to Hamilton:**

**Community Services for  
New Immigrants and Refugees**

**By**

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## **PART I: Summary of Identified Gaps in Community Services for New Immigrants and Refugees**

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During April and May of this year, the Hamilton Training Advisory Board undertook an informal survey of the services available to new immigrants and refugees in our community with the understanding that the recruitment and retention of immigrant skills extends beyond employment to a welcoming community that supports all aspects of integration. Twenty individuals representing policy makers, service providers, and consumers of immigrant and refugee services were asked to identify what they consider to be gaps in service.

The purpose of this informal consultation process was to gather not only information that would compliment the immigrant skills research completed by Rich Janzen and his team, but also to provide a point of departure for small group discussions at *Hamilton's Immigration Summit* on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at Liuna Station.

The following is a summary of sample issues identified by individuals providing and receiving services for immigrant and refugee populations in the City of Hamilton.

### **1. Accreditation and Licensing**

Exploring the challenges and issues for internationally trained professionals including credential assessment, credential recognition, regulatory bodies, bridging programs, etc.

Sample Issues:

- Time. Funding requirements and the demand for results often limit the time and support a service provider can spend helping skilled immigrants with accreditation. Also, immigrants experience frustration at the length of time it takes to work their way through “the system” and to obtain employment that often does not meet their expectations.
- Limited availability of bridging programs or flexible course structures that allow internationally trained immigrants to fill gaps in skills/knowledge as needed as well as student funding support for this purpose.
- Consistent, accurate, and timely credential assessment is needed.

## **2. Skills and Language Training For Adults**

Exploring the challenges and issues for immigrants accessing ESL, LINC, sector specific language, literacy, tuition funding, skills training, etc.

Sample Issues:

- Too few ESL programs offer daycare and those that do currently have a wait list. This restriction places immigrant caregivers at a disadvantage.
- After leaving the school system, immigrant youth with continuing language needs cannot access courses with specific content (e.g. science, math) that will prepare them for college. Where this type of course exists, it is only available for a fee which presents a financial barrier.
- Lack of comprehensive and easily accessible information about community programs, training opportunities, and post-secondary education.
- Increasing need for affordable and accessible advanced sector-specific language training to facilitate workforce integration.
- Prior learning or competency-based assessments are currently not consistent, easily accessible, or particularly affordable in the college system. Also, PLAR is no longer funded at Mohawk College.
- LBS in French is currently not available in Hamilton

## **3. Accessing Employment**

Exploring the challenges and issues for immigrants seeking employment including Canadian experience, orientation to the Canadian labour market, mentorship, job shadowing, etc.

Sample Issues:

- Discrepancy between the employment expectations of highly skilled and educated newcomers and services that currently cannot adequately, or quickly, assist with achieving these expectations.
- Time. Funding requirements and the demand for results often limits employment service providers to assisting immigrants with meeting short term employment goals. These short-term goals often result in low-paying, unstable employment for many immigrants.
- There is a high demand for Canadian work experience and knowledge of Canadian company culture but too few opportunities to achieve either goal.
- Currently no resources or support for immigrants interested in investment opportunities or starting their own business.

#### **4. Workplace Integration**

Exploring the challenges and issues for immigrants integrating into the workplace. Also, the challenges faced by employers in employing a diverse workforce.

Sample Issues:

- Most employers don't know how to integrate immigrants into their workforce and too few understand the education and training immigrants have to offer.
- Corporate and municipal leadership on issues such as recruiting and retaining an immigrant workforce is lacking.
- Gap between employers' workforce needs and the skills newcomers are bringing to the community.

#### **5. Settlement**

Exploring the challenges and issues for immigrants in settlement including housing, orientation to the Canadian culture, accessing the Canadian healthcare system, finding childcare, etc.

Sample Issues:

- Language barrier encountered when accessing essential services, e.g. emergency services, health care, immigration assistance, job search, etc. Overall, there is a general lack of interpretation and translation services in the community.
- Too few organizations serving immigrants must meet the challenge of providing a wide variety of crucial services to a large and diverse population with limited money, time, and staff.
- Need to increase the sensitivity of all service providers in the community to the specific needs of immigrants and to increase the capacity of these organizations to serve newcomers and to network their supports.
- 95% of immigrant women are primary caregivers and unless they are receiving a child care subsidy through Ontario Works, they cannot access regulated childcare while they pursue their job search. The "working poor" who cannot access a subsidy and cannot afford childcare simply fall through the cracks.
- Many services are offered as pilot programs and are time-limited. Although these services are initiated to meet a demand, they may not secure sustainable funding in order to continue to serve clients in the long-term.
- Lack of current information about services available to newcomers in their own language upon entering our community. More preparation prior to arrival regarding realistic expectations of employment and integration.

## **6. Refugees**

Exploring the specific challenges and issues faced by refugees in settlement including literacy, lack of documentation, trauma, etc.

Sample Issues:

- Lack of transitional (short-term) housing that will specifically meet the needs of newly arrived refugee claimants and government sponsored refugees.
- Increasing need for advocacy for the rights of refugees, e.g. legal representation; family re-unification.
- Limited funding, programs, and qualified staff (trained specifically to assist refugees) are exceeded by the diverse needs of a growing population of refugees.
- Refugee youth do not have the language skills to help them succeed in high school and are at higher risk of dropping out than other youth.

## **7. Immigrant Children and Youth**

Exploring the challenges and issues faced immigrant children and youth entering the Canadian education system.

Sample Issues:

- Immigrant youth entering the school system for the first time at the high school level are often not prepared for the workforce when they are required to leave the system at twenty-one.
- Inflexible funding for ESL programs in high school does not accommodate a fluctuating client population that is the result of continuous intake over the course of the school year. Also, more time is needed to help students achieve a level of functioning literacy.
- Youth with language and/or employment needs may not be aware of the services available to them in the community once they leave high school. Currently there is no link between the school system and community services that allows for communication and tracking of these youth and which may facilitate their successful integration into the workforce.
- Gap between welcoming immigrants to the community and supporting their arrival at the school level with increased funding and programs that will address the needs of immigrant children and youth.

## **8. Culture and Recreation**

Exploring the challenges and issues faced by immigrant families as they adapt to life in Canada.

Sample Issues:

- Isolation and segregation of newcomers who are not aware of or connected to existing cultural groups in the community.
- There is a general gap in the cultural and recreational services in the community targeting immigrant youth largely due to lack of financial resources.
- Barriers to family participation in programs include: cost, language, location, unfamiliarity with “process” of participation (how to register, materials required, etc.), and the pervasive sense of being an “outsider” (particularly felt by children and youth).

## **9. Marketing Hamilton to Immigrants**

- Competition with other cities and Hamilton’s capacity to be a “welcoming community”.



## **PART II: A Survey of Community Services for New Immigrants and Refugees**

**Presented by Simone Saunders, Project and Communications Coordinator,  
Hamilton Training Advisory Board at *Hamilton's Immigration Summit* held on  
June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at Liuna Station, Hamilton.**

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Good morning.

If we imagine for a moment an immigrant family newly arrived in Hamilton, we can certainly argue that immediately securing employment is critical if even the basic necessities of life are to be met and it is essential if the family is to thrive.

But the challenge of finding work does not exist in a vacuum.

If we step back and broaden our perspective of the newly arrived immigrant family, we might see, for example, that in addition to finding work, the parents are navigating their way through a number of new and challenging experiences. These may include finding safe and affordable housing, sourcing appropriate healthcare, enrolling their children in school, completing the immigration process, and obtaining credential recognition. These challenges are complicated by minimal, if not non-existent, English language skills and limited access to interpretation or translation services.

It was this understanding that the recruitment and retention of immigrant skills extends beyond employment to a welcoming community that supports all aspects of integration which prompted the Hamilton Training Advisory Board to undertake an informal survey of the services available to new immigrants and refugees in our community.

Twenty individuals representing policy makers, service providers, and consumers of immigrant and refugee services were interviewed. They were asked to identify what they consider to be gaps in service and to suggest solutions for addressing these gaps. They were also asked the question: "How effective is Hamilton at integrating immigrants and refugees into the community?"

The purpose of this informal consultation process was to gather not only information that would compliment the immigrant skills research completed by Rich Janzen and his team, but also to provide a point of departure for the small group discussions at today's summit. I would like to address the latter objective and share with you some of the thoughts and ideas that were told to me over the course of the last few months.

If asked to summarize the gaps in services to immigrants and refugees in Hamilton, I could simply say “funding”. With increased funding, organizations could provide a greater number and a wider variety of services. They could hire and train more staff. They could publish their materials in multiple languages. The shopping list is long and increased funding is frequently identified as an area of need. However, service providers understand that the need for funding and the availability of funding do not always coincide. Recognizing that the money is simply not there for the asking challenges us to be more disciplined in identifying areas of greatest need and to be more creative in finding solutions for our community.

When we set aside funding, the first theme that emerges is time – specifically the lack of time.

From the perspective of the service provider, funding requirements limit the amount of time that can be dedicated to each client when assisting them with anything from pursuing accreditation to the job search. For example, the demand for results may limit service providers to assisting immigrants with meeting short term employment goals over long term goals. In this situation, the result may be low-paying, unstable employment for many immigrants.

Furthermore, many services are offered as pilot programs and although they are initiated to meet a demand they may be time-limited if sustainable funding cannot be secured to provide service in the long term. In this case, a critical need that is being met today may not be met tomorrow.

Another area where time was identified as a factor was in regards to immigrant youth entering the system for the first time at the high school level. Required to leave at age 21 along with their peers, these youth may not have had sufficient time to raise their language skills to a functioning level of literacy and generally may not have achieved the skills needed to prepare them for the workforce.

Finally, for many immigrants it is not the lack of time but their frustration with the length of time it takes for them to work their way through the system due to misdirection, waiting lists, or slow bureaucracy. In the end the effort may not seem worth it when they find themselves in employment that does not meet their expectations.

A second theme that emerges is what I will broadly term “supports for employment success”.

This includes issues such as the limited availability of bridging programs or flexible course structures that would allow internationally trained immigrants to fill the gaps in their skills and knowledge as needed as well as student funding support for this purpose.

Also the lack of prior learning or competency-based assessments that are consistent, accessible, and – most importantly – affordable is an issue.

To return to youth for a moment, youth with language and employment needs may not be aware of the services available to them in the community once they leave high school at age 21. Currently there is no link between the school system and community services that allows for seamless service transition and which may facilitate their successful integration into the workforce.

The concern that is most frequently raised of course is the high demand for Canadian work experience and knowledge of Canadian company culture but the lack of opportunities to achieve either goal.

This last point brings me to employers – many of whom are described as simply not knowing how to integrate immigrants into their workforce or not understanding the education and training that immigrants have to offer.

And before I leave this theme I would like to touch on a gap that has a particular impact on women. Immigrant women are most often the primary caregiver and unless they are receiving a child care subsidy through Ontario Works they can not afford to access regulated child care while they pursue their job search. Women who fall into the category of the “working poor” cannot access this subsidy and again, cannot afford regulated childcare. In this way, the availability and affordability of safe childcare is a significant gap for immigrant women seeking employment.

A third theme concerns the services available to refugees in our community. Specific issues raised include the following:

- The lack of transitional (short-term) housing that will specifically meet the needs of newly arrived refugee claimants and government sponsored refugees.
- The lack of advocacy for the rights of refugees, for example in areas such as legal representation and family re-unification.
- Also limited funding, programs, and qualified staff trained to assist refugees are not adequate to the diverse needs of this growing population.

These are just some of the gaps in services currently being provided to immigrants and refugees in our community.

I would like to turn now to my final question: How effective overall is Hamilton at integrating newcomers?

On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being Very Effective and 1 being Not Effective, Hamilton merits a rating of 2 according to my interviewees which translates into “Somewhat Effective”.

I know that this ranking appears somewhat bleak, however, I found – and I’m sure you will agree – that the explanation given for this response reveals an optimism and an energy that bodes well for your work here today.

I am referring to the nearly unanimous recognition that there exists tremendous goodwill in our community towards understanding and addressing the challenges facing immigrants and refugees. It is only the way that is currently lacking.

And judging from the responses to the question as to how the gaps in service might be addressed, the way is already lit by creative solutions.

Some of the opportunities identified include:

Encouraging communication between immigration and HRSDC to ensure that workforce needs are considered alongside other factors in the immigration process.

Also, initiating instances of corporate and municipal leadership on issues such as recruiting and retaining an immigrant workforce would set the tone for the community and generate incentive to be high achievers.

There is also the opportunity to increase the networking capacity amongst our organizations by educating them about the needs of immigrants and refugees and the services available to them. This process may motivate organizations to expand their services to address these populations thus increasing the availability and accessibility of services overall.

We could also expand the existing network of services by using our knowledge of immigrants' first contacts in the community to disseminate information – for example food banks, churches, cultural groups, and other grassroots organizations – again increasing outreach.

The current lack of recreational and cultural resources serving immigrants and refugees could potentially be met by offering a rich diversity of programs ranging from sports, to basic skills, to youth leadership; thus further expanding opportunities for cultural integration in our community.

I would like to conclude with a direct quote from one of the interviews:

One participant told me: “I believe it is important for our community to move beyond polite tolerance of new immigrants to a place where newcomers are actively welcomed and included in all levels of community life. We have much to learn from each other.”

So we return to this idea of a welcoming community that takes full integration of newcomers to heart that I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation. And I agree that we have much to learn from each other and that is what today is really about – bringing our individual experiences, our goodwill, and our ideas forward and shaping them into a plan of action.

Finally, I would like to end my presentation on a note of thanks to those who shared their thoughts and their ideas – often along with their frustration and their passion - for the purpose of this survey. Thank you.