



Newcomer Consultations in Hamilton: A Summary Overview of Findings

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The Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council



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Preface

This report provides a broad overview of the results of consultations and discussions held with over 400 newcomers to Hamilton in preparation for the development of Hamilton's first ever Immigration Strategy. Twelve focus group meetings were held with diverse immigrant and refugee communities including African Francophone, Chinese, Karen, South Asian, Spanish, Iraqi and Arab, as well as youth and women newcomers. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with settlement service providers.

This report reflects, in summary form, the many voices of newcomers to Hamilton. This is not an academic study, nor is it an attempt to gather and reiterate the voluminous literature and research on the longstanding and persistent challenges of the immigrant integration process. Instead, this report highlights the common barriers, struggles and needs experienced by some of Hamilton's diverse newcomer communities as they adjust to life in a new country.

This report is intended to contribute to updating our understanding of how most recent arrivals to Hamilton are managing. It is a summary overview of the many diverse voices of recent newcomers to Hamilton. It is their experiences and challenges in making a new life for themselves in Hamilton that are shared in these pages. They have expressed a range of emotions – from relief and gratitude in being in Hamilton, to varying degrees of quiet acceptance, disappointment, frustration and sometimes anger at the difficulties they have faced.

The “immigrant experience” is never an easy one, and that so many recent newcomers to the city were willing to share their experiences is a testament to their commitment to Hamilton and their faith and optimism for the future. Their contributions are gratefully appreciated.

The first conclusion from these community consultations that needs to be stressed is that the vast majority of newcomers are pleased to be here. They like the city of Hamilton and they want to settle here. They are knowledgeable about Hamilton's strengths and weaknesses and they want to contribute to the life of the city and make it a better place to live.

But there are challenges, and the focus of this report is on the gaps, issues and barriers impacting recent immigrants and refugees in Hamilton. This report also includes a number of suggestions made by newcomers for improving the settlement process. In their own words, a number of remedies are put forward as to how the immigrant integration process might be accelerated.

If Hamilton is to be a more welcoming and inclusive community, and if Hamilton wishes to continue to attract and retain immigrants, it is important that we as a city address these barriers and consider the possible solutions. If Hamilton is to

continue to be an immigrant-friendly city, these unmet needs that have been identified by newcomers themselves require serious attention in order to facilitate and accelerate their successful integration to our city.

The work of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) and the Facilitating Inclusion Cooperative of the St. Joseph's Immigrant Women Centre is gratefully acknowledged for facilitating a number of these group consultations with newcomers. Numerous local community groups, organizations and individuals have also participated in consultations, including leaders of faith groups, immigrant associations, residents of neighbourhood hubs, settlement and service agencies, union leaders, municipal staff and many others. Both their time and contributions are much appreciated.

Many of the issues identified are not new however they act as an important reminder that the barriers faced by immigrants are not going away. The new immigrants to Hamilton certainly recognize and acknowledge that the adjustment process is sometimes a very difficult process that they are willing to endure. But when the settlement period is taking longer today than ever before in Canadian history – as shown by growing differences in income levels, poverty rates and employment levels – then it is incumbent upon the receiving society to review its behaviours, values and institutional practices to make the adjustment period as short as possible.

Hamilton needs immigrants more than ever before at a time when every city in Ontario is competing for immigrants. At the same time immigrants are more mobile and more willing to move than ever before. Thus, the barriers to settlement and the solutions to overcome them described by the newcomers in this report must be addressed if Hamilton is going to continue to attract and embrace newcomers.

Introduction

When families move to a new city, parents need to find safe and affordable housing, arrange for making the environment livable, enroll their children in school, access needed healthcare, find employment, arrange transportation and connect to a support network.

All of these transitions are difficult for someone who has lived in Canada for decades. For the newcomer to Canada, these transitions are even more challenging. The challenges may be due to limited or no proficiency in the English or French language, unfamiliarity with the cultural practices in Canada, lack of readily accessible information or barriers to recreational opportunities.

Unlike Canadians who relocate within Canada, newcomers to Hamilton, due to their new immigrant or refugee status, also need to access basic information about the immigration process, obtain interpretation or translation services, understand legal, educational and social systems and obtain credential recognition.

While adjusting to the challenges of a new life, many immigrants also deal with emotional challenges from their past life experiences, separation from family, discrimination, as well as feelings of loneliness and powerlessness. Some newcomers are further marginalized by low income, visible minority status, disability, sexual orientation and/or age.

Immigrants to Hamilton are characterized by considerable diversity in terms of region of origin, family composition, language ability, immigration class, income and resources, educational level, visible minority status, faith and cultural values. Some immigrants have more needs and face more difficulties in settling due to the complexity of these characteristics than others. Their needs are interrelated, and the pathways to integration varied and stressful.

1.0 Employment

“Hamilton’s working population does not reflect its immigrant populations.”
(Settlement Service Provider)

Many immigrants and refugees arriving in Hamilton are facing major difficulties in being able to transfer their knowledge, training and skills to the local labour market and be equally represented in the Hamilton workforce.

Newcomers to Hamilton identified many barriers to employment, the most pervasive of which include:

- requiring “Canadian experience” for employment

- lack of recognition of foreign credentials, particularly in regulated professions
- lack of language skills
- inadequate funding for job-specific language training programs
- non-inclusive hiring practices
- cultural differences
- lack of knowledge of Canadian workplace practices
- lack of professional networks
- discrimination

Largely due to one or many of these barriers, immigrants in Hamilton tend to take up jobs for survival during the settlement process. This situation contributes to the high number of immigrants living below the poverty line, despite the credentials that many immigrants possess.

From the discussions with the newcomers and service providers, it became clear that employers specified “Canadian experience” as a non-negotiable prerequisite to employment. Lack of experience in the Canadian work environment is therefore a major barrier in obtaining any type of employment for newcomers.

Newcomers expressed frustration at not being given a chance to show their skills and talents to prove that they are capable of learning. Newcomers said they fully expected to make sacrifices and face challenges when relocating to Hamilton, but they did not anticipate the degree to which opportunities would be restricted, despite their educational training, skill set and expertise.

Skilled and experienced newcomers have indicated that the persistent undervaluation of their experiences and credentials from abroad not only poorly position them as competitive candidates, but also shifts the burden of proof onto them in attempting to verify the authenticity of their qualifications¹. A number of newcomers consulted for this report described the process of verifying credentials as an extremely time-consuming, tedious, expensive process that is discouraging or altogether inaccessible.

Newcomers to Hamilton said they are concerned that the pre-migration labour market information available to them from abroad is not credible and sometimes misleading. They expressed the need to be given a realistic picture about the potential difficulties in finding employment in specific fields. This lack of information spans other areas besides job availability and accessibility. The newcomer women consulted for this report noted that before arriving here they were able to obtain only very limited information about local health and education services or employment and professional development opportunities.

Some of the newcomers also stated that they had no access to information and training for employment in various occupations. Limited access to job-specific language training programs, for example, creates challenges with regard to

interview and workplace preparation, even when jobs become available for which the newcomers are highly qualified.

Discussions with service providers and consultations with newcomers highlighted the lack of accurate information and awareness about immigrants among Hamilton residents. This has led to unfounded biases or beliefs about immigrants and refugees in many respects, not the least of which has to do with their employability. Consequently, newcomers tend not to be even considered for an interview for a job that they would be unquestionably qualified to do. Newcomers identified discrimination as a major barrier, indeed this service provider said newcomers would go to great lengths because of it:

“Immigrants sometimes change their names to get a chance to be called for an interview.” (Settlement Service Provider)

Newcomers said they are further disadvantaged during the interview process if they are unfamiliar with some of the customs or workplace practices. This type of unpreparedness is indeed a persistent barrier. Also, many businesses and institutions do not advertise for positions in non-mainstream media or utilize information networks that are commonly used by immigrant populations.

The newcomers consulted spoke enthusiastically about wanting to find employment yet they believed there are not enough jobs available in Hamilton for newcomers, especially professionals. They said they are often told by settlement workers or employment counselors only of job postings in the trades or low paying jobs. The persistent search for suitable employment forces many newcomers to leave Hamilton and seek opportunities elsewhere.

The majority of the newcomers said they wanted to feel like they are a part of the community and wanted to contribute to Hamilton's economy. They believe that they can benefit by having more knowledge about Canadian workplace practices, networking with others in the same or similar professions, having mentors available in various occupations and learning about cultural differences. They noted that the availability of language classes as well as bridging and educational programs to better prepare them for employment is a major gap in services offered to them. They also felt that employers need to be more culturally competent and also be given incentives to hire newcomers.

Many newcomers arrive in Hamilton as Economic Class migrants primarily comprising of professionals and skilled workers some of whom hope to establish their own businesses thereby creating employment for others. According to the Hamilton Training Advisory Board (HTAB), newcomers who are interested in investment opportunities or starting their own businesses currently have limited access to resources or support to do so. Therefore those willing to contribute to the community in an entrepreneurial fashion are still at a disadvantage since the resources required for self-employment are equally if not more scarce than

employment services. The gap in self-employment accessibility exposes an even deeper-rooted barrier for newcomer women who wish to start or own their own businesses. The need for childminding and the lack of micro-lending programs to help with the startup of new businesses were identified as major setbacks by many of the newcomers.

Consultations with newcomers and service providers have suggested that more interaction and interfacing with retired business entrepreneurs or current business owners would enable newcomers to learn about owning and operating a business in Canada. Newcomers interested in becoming self-employed said they needed support in learning the various skills needed to survive and thrive in a competitive Canadian environment.

“The city can invest in newcomers by helping them get started when they first arrive by offering tax breaks on new businesses or for investors, etcetera for specific periods of time.” (Female Newcomer)

2.0 Settlement Services

Newcomers rely on both the formal and informal settlement sector for services and support. The formal settlement sector can include those organizations that receive government or foundation funding to provide services to newcomers, whereas the informal settlement sector are those organizations and institutions not funded by government or foundation resources but nevertheless play a vital role in the lives of newcomers such as religious institutions and ethno-cultural associationsⁱⁱ.

Research has suggested that the majority of immigrants do not always or immediately access formal support services. Newcomers tend to rely on family and friends for advice and support upon arrival. There are numerous reasons for not accessing the formal services. The main reasons that were offered are that newcomers are unaware of what is available and there are barriers related to language, location, transportation and child minding. Limited use of publicly-funded settlement agencies can also be explained by perceived stigma associated with their use, cultural values and past experiences of refugees. For example, some refugees do not trust “authority” so they may not use formal services.

Hamilton has been fortunate to have a number of organizations and informal networks serving immigrants and refugees. Generally, most newcomers consulted were grateful for the support they received during the early settlement period. However, many described facing ongoing challenges after initial support and services were received.

While the newcomers did not express complete dissatisfaction with formal settlement services, many did note that there are not enough newcomer information centres and the type of assistance and the level of assistance did not always meet their needs. Many immigrants have difficulty accessing settlement services because they are concentrated in specific areas. Newcomers to Hamilton suggested that more sites would improve their access to services. They also stressed that information disseminated in different languages, formats and locations and “ambassadors” speaking at faith communities would be more effective at reaching newcomers. Many newcomers pointed to the lack of a comprehensive, well-organized inventory of settlement services in Hamilton. Easily accessible information, in a variety of formats, about settlement services (both formal and informal) would benefit many newcomers.

The newcomer youth consulted for this report said they felt their needs are not being addressed by current settlement services. They want more information about a variety of jobs, not just low level and manual labour jobs. They also want to learn about admission processes to colleges and universities, grants, loans, scholarship programs and English language requirements.

While the majority of newcomers said they found settlement services staff very helpful, some said there is a need for settlement workers to be more professional and respect the confidentiality of clients. Newcomers also thought service providers could be more culturally competent. Service providers themselves said staff needed to be more knowledgeable about other supports in the community and be able to address the unique and varied needs of clients rather than handling all newcomers’ needs in the same way.

The time limitations for government support have serious implications for some newcomers. For example, government assisted refugees receive supports for the first year in Canada. Generally, these refugees have a worker assigned to them for just over two months which is inadequate in addressing their long-term settlement and integration needs. Some refugees need more supports to be able to adapt to living in larger urban communities or dealing with traumas experienced prior to coming to Canada. Very little is known about how refugees integrate over the long term.

3.0 Language Training

“We do not feel connected to the community and language is a huge barrier.”
(Female Newcomer)

Although many immigrants speak either English or French, many still need language skills training in order to be employable and/or pursue formal education. There also are a significant number of newcomers who have no knowledge of English and face immense barriers to obtaining the help they need.

While there are some well-established programs in Hamilton that provide English language training, feedback from recent newcomers to Hamilton suggests they do not meet the extent and level required by many newcomers. The newcomers said they have struggled to find ESL classes that fulfill all of their needs. Some newcomers have suggested that there are too few ESL programs that offer daycare. Many newcomers to Hamilton have young children and since child minding is difficult to obtain, parents, especially mothers, are not able to attend classes outside of their homes. The language programs that do provide child minding, generally have a wait list. This restriction places immigrants who care for young children at a disadvantage. Many newcomer parents are motivated to become employed and to be self-supporting however without being able to readily access ESL classes they are unable to do so thereby delaying their integration into the community.

The newcomers said they had experienced Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes with inadequate numbers of trained tutors to meet the demands of the class because of the diversity of literacy levels among the students. These newcomers also expressed the need to have classes that focus on distinct skills in order to address their particular learning needs. They repeatedly noted that their integration into Canadian society would be facilitated by more flexible arrangements for the provision of enhanced language training and programs that can accommodate people at different times during the day. This would allow many to work during the day and learn English in the evening. Francophone immigrants face additional challenges in Hamilton as many service providers and organizations do not use French as their primary language.

LINC students expressed some frustration with the assessment process of their English skills and the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Inability to meet the assessment criteria can prevent individuals from accessing employment.

Eligibility requirements for accessing (CIC funded) services are problematic for many newcomers. Services are only available to permanent residents and protected persons/Convention refugees, thereby excluding Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, and others waiting to receive permanent residency. These rules may underestimate the difficulty that some newcomers face in learning the languages, particularly if they are elderly persons, if they have children or other family responsibilities, or if they have not had the opportunity to learn and practice English before coming to Canada (e.g. living in refugee camps).

One approach that may be helpful in addressing unmet language training needs is to build and maintain more collaborative working relationships in Hamilton between the various programs and institutions that offer LINC and ESL classes. Advocacy is also needed at the federal government level to change some of the policies that are hindering the settlement and integration process.

4.0 Formal Education

While Hamilton has excellent educational institutions, accessing formal education in this city is challenging for immigrants and refugees for a number of reasons. To begin, there is a lack of comprehensive and readily available information about community programs, training opportunities and post-secondary education. Limited facility in English and limited finances also create additional barriers to access.

The shortage of bridging programs or flexible course structures that allow internationally-trained immigrants to fulfill their skills and knowledge needs, as well as student funding support presents immense barriers. There is an increasing need for affordable and accessible advanced sector-specific language training to facilitate workforce integration. Also, many newcomers said they believed there is a lack of consistency in assessment of prior learning.

At the post secondary level, learning the admission process and selecting courses can be confusing even for those who speak English so for newcomers who have limited English proficiency the process is often daunting and very frustrating.

Children and Youth

Newcomer children and youth face many challenges when they begin school. Some of these challenges are a result of being discriminated against due to their accents or appearance, or they struggle because they lack proficient English language skills. Many refugees who come directly from a life in refugee camps, may not have had access to any formal or informal education. The transition to school for these children and youth can be extremely difficult.

Because many immigrant parents are busy trying to earn an income, struggle with the language, trying to fulfill the basic needs of their family as well as trying to adjust to the demands of relocation, they are not always able or available to provide the necessary support to their children when it comes to their education. Many immigrant and refugee children and youth require social and academic support to allow them to reach their potential academically.

Newcomer youth and parents shared their feelings about being confused and not being understood in a new learning environment. Cultural awareness and understanding by students, teachers and staff would be very helpful to make newcomers feel welcome and supported. Newcomer families would also like to understand the dominant cultural practices and norms so that they can learn how to negotiate the system better. Newcomers suggested that an “ambassador” or a liaison person between the school and various ethno-cultural communities would facilitate information sharing about schooling.

After school homework programs were viewed as being very useful to address academic support. Public library programs have also helped many newcomers with information and English literacy. Many newcomers noted that having mentors from the immigrant communities could serve as valuable resources.

5.0 Health Care

The newcomers and service providers consulted described continuing and serious gaps in health care service delivery to immigrants and refugees and the consequences this has for newcomers. The consensus is that newcomers are not receiving health care that meets their needs due to:

- Limited number of culturally-competent health care providers,
- Inadequate translation/interpretation services
- Shortage of service providers who speak their language
- Waiting times for OHIP coverage
- Limited financial resources for private pay services

Six months after arrival, the majority of immigrants are eligible to obtain a provincial health card, and therefore have access to a broad range of health servicesⁱⁱⁱ. For some newcomers, however, having to wait to become eligible for OHIP covered services is problematic and their ability to pay for these services is limited due to low income.

Some of the newcomers consulted said they had experienced health care from professionals who generally do not have the experience, knowledge or skills to provide care that is culturally-competent. The differences in cultural values of recipients and providers can result in misunderstanding, misdiagnosis and may influence the course of treatment prescribed. Also, refugees who have experienced war, torture and other traumas may present symptoms in ways that are unfamiliar to health care professionals^{iv}. The lack of understanding of cultural values of newcomers can cause them more harm and suffering even though this is not the provider's intention. Health care professionals need to be sensitive to the various challenging and sometimes extreme conditions out of which these patients are transitioning.

The newcomers pointed to the lack of interpreters or bilingual providers as the greatest barrier to accessing health care. These barriers are experienced when accessing care in physicians' offices, hospitals, home care and community-based programs. In addition, without English literacy, newcomers face significant barriers to health promotion and prevention programs. Language barriers sometimes result in lack of privacy, confidentiality and informed consent. Reliance on family members or untrained interpreters can lead to compromising patients' rights to confidentiality and also can be a detriment to their health as the potential for errors and biases can be increased in the translation.

In addition, due to limited financial resources, many newcomers cannot afford any additional medical related expenses that are not publically funded. Many newcomers who are employed, work in low paying positions or with small businesses, and do not have insurance coverage beyond OHIP^v.

Mental Health

The consultations with newcomers and interviews with service providers identified a lack of culturally appropriate family counseling services in Hamilton. Newcomer families sometimes need assistance with specific issues such loss and trauma, inter-partner violence, addictions, gambling and anger management. Settlement service agencies receive requests to provide such assistance but settlement services staff members are not trained to handle these mental health needs.

Most mainstream mental health services are aimed at the general population and often are not equipped to work with newcomers, especially refugees. In addition to language barriers, newcomers must deal with services that are not culturally sensitive and some services require medical diagnoses that many newcomers would not have been able to obtain because they could not access a family doctor. Linguistic and cultural barriers can mean newcomers' with mental health needs are not receiving timely and effective attention.

6.0 Housing

"...these apartment buildings are poorly maintained, we sometimes use neighbours' washrooms for weeks while waiting for repair. Most of these buildings are filled with pests." (Newcomer)

Accessing affordable and adequate housing is a continuing challenge for many newcomers even after the first year of settlement. Demands the newcomers face when looking for a place to live present immense barriers to their settlement and integration. For example, immigrants and refugees are questioned about their credit history, co-signers, references and supporting documentation, without regard to the fact that because they are new to the country they do not have many of these requirements. Some of the policies, regulations and practices make it extremely difficult for newcomers to access housing.

The newcomers asserted that there needs to be more affordable and subsidized housing programs in the city.

Many newcomers also said they experienced discrimination by landlords because of their lack of proficiency in English, visible minority status, family size and/or place of origin. Accessing social housing for large families was said to be a continuing challenge in Hamilton. Additionally, the newcomers described the

housing conditions available to them as often poor and unsafe and felt they are forced to live in sub-standard housing because they are commensurate with their low income levels. Since many immigrants are not aware of their rights as tenants, the newcomers consulted said it is necessary for privately rented accommodations to be monitored better to ensure they live in safe conditions, which is often not the case. The newcomers also said they would like to know where they can go to voice their concerns and have their housing issues addressed.

Urban Planning

Due to the location of affordable housing units, family, and friendship networks, concentrations of immigrants and/or ethno-racial groups develop in specific geographic areas in Hamilton. Some of the newcomers said that living in an area where they receive support from their own ethno-cultural communities has helped with their adjustment process. Affordable or low-income housing however is located in areas that do not necessarily have other amenities or where newcomer families feel safe and comfortable.

The newcomers discussed the condition of downtown Hamilton, pollution and homelessness. Residents of these neighbourhoods also may be exposed to social ills like crime, violence and disorder. However, the newcomers said that living in these areas meant they are fairly well-served by social service agencies because these neighbourhoods acted as immigrant staging grounds so social service providers serve successive cohorts of people moving through these neighbourhoods.

Sometimes the least expensive (and least desirable) housing is located in large clusters of apartment buildings in the aging suburban areas. This has created a new form of social isolation – isolation from services and limited transportation. The low urban density of such areas and their distance from the urban core mean that it is difficult to provide social services to such areas. Moreover, the built form (i.e., large, wide roads and high apartment buildings mixed with single family dwellings) and land use (mainly residential, office and large-scale retail) provides few spaces conducive for people to develop support networks and other kinds of social networks.

The idea was put forward that the City of Hamilton consider and recognize enclaves of ethno-cultural communities when engaging with urban planners. A more inclusive approach would recognize the importance of neighbourhoods where the geographic concentration of newcomers and ethno-racial minorities is stable, and highly adaptive for promoting well-being. Such neighbourhoods can serve as the site for powerful support networks for mutual aid, effective employment networks and important bases for political action to advance collective interests. The neighbourhood hubs initiative should be supported in

Hamilton as an effective means of providing a variety of needs of immigrant communities.

Transportation gaps for newcomers are addressed in a separate section below.

7.0 Culture and Recreation

While many newcomers value the many recreational programs and community centres, ethno-culturally specific groups and faith communities that exist in Hamilton, they also identified some gaps. The newcomers said they do not have enough information about what is available throughout the city with regard to culture and recreation. They suggested having a free cultural and recreational tour of the city for newcomers when they first arrive, in order to know what is available to appreciate what this community has to offer.

For cultural and religious reasons, the female newcomers noted that more women-only recreational programming is needed so that they are able to participate. The women also spoke about the need for more family centred recreational and cultural events as well as affordable child-minding services, which would facilitate their participation in the recreational and cultural life of Hamilton.

Some newcomers are artists who could use encouragement and support becoming integrated into Hamilton's arts community. Exposing the cultural talents of newcomers would also contribute to the richness of the cultural experiences of all of Hamilton's residents. Francophone immigrants and refugees expressed concern that there are not enough cultural and social events in Hamilton to address their specific interests.

While recreational programs offered at mainstream centres are becoming more inclusive, the majority of them are still not utilized by newcomers. Seniors who identify as belonging to visible minority groups, in particular, feel that they do not belong in mainstream programs. They said they preferred to participate in more culturally-relevant social activities and in smaller facilities.

8.0 Transportation

Accessible and affordable transportation is an ongoing challenge for many citizens but for newcomers, lack of adequate transportation compounds the already difficult process of settlement and integration.

The newcomers expressed frustration with the public transportation system because service is limited late at night. The newcomers who work shifts have

difficulty getting to their places of employment and in some of the newcomers' neighbourhoods, public transportation is not available at all or is infrequent.

Since limited financial resources are an issue for so many newcomers, they suggested that travel subsidies would be instrumental in facilitating their access to training, education and employment. Accessing settlement and integration services, health care and recreational facilities all can be improved with some support for transportation.

Often settlement services and mainstream organizations overlook the needs of newcomer seniors. Many seniors experience a great deal of isolation because they have no means of going to places where they may have the opportunity to interact with others. Providing subsidized and accessible transportation to seniors will greatly improve their engagement with the community and decrease isolation.

9.0 Information and Awareness

The newcomers talked about a need for information about immigrants to be disseminated to the general public and among various mainstream sectors of the community. The newcomers also said they have unmet information needs about settlement and integration. For example, many of the newcomers were unaware that on limited incomes they are eligible for subsidized dental care, vision care and Ontario drug plans.

Through consultations with newcomers and those who serve newcomers, it became clear that both groups strongly believe that the general public, including various institutions and employers are not fully aware of the education, skills and talents recent immigrants possess. Also the various sectors in the community are not well-informed about the challenges and barriers faced by new immigrants. Businesses are unsure of how to integrate newcomers into the labour force or respond to their needs. Mainstream service agencies and institutions do not have the resources or the understanding of how to work collaboratively with ethno-cultural communities.

New immigrants need to be able to access accurate, reliable and current information in a timely manner from formal and informal sources. While Hamilton is fortunate to have multiple sources of information available to the public through Hamilton Community Information, myHamilton, Hamilton Public Library, The City's Immigration Portal and the Community Care Access Centre, these sources do not meet the needs of those newcomers who may not be proficient in English or in the use of technology. In addition to promoting the above sources, newcomers said they would like to be able to access information about settlement and integration services using different types of media in many languages.

Newcomers need a wide range of services and supports to help them adjust to life in Canada. While they acknowledged that current settlement services are helpful, they felt that many of their diverse needs are still not being adequately met. As a result, many of the newcomers said they had to rely on informal networks to help them settle and integrate into Hamilton.

Since many immigrants rely on family and friends for support and information, it is vitally important that the information they give to newcomers be timely, accurate, reliable and complete to facilitate their prompt and successful integration into the community.

Ethno-cultural media sources could be used more effectively to inform newcomers and communities about support and services available to assist with their settlement needs. The newcomers noted a lack of opportunities to connect with others who can be a source of assistance. Fairs to welcome newcomers to Hamilton with representatives from various service agencies and settlement organizations, networking events and seminars conducted in different languages about the Canadian job market are just some of the activities newcomers said would help to address their information needs.

10.0 Inclusive and Welcoming Community

“There is racism here, it is not upfront – it is subtle hence difficult to confront.”
(Settlement Service Provider)

“There is a pervasive sense of being an outsider.” (Female Newcomer)

According to the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council's Immigration Strategy 2010, a welcoming community is one in which the contributions and achievements of immigrants are promoted, diversity is encouraged and celebrated, inclusivity is regularly practiced, community cohesion is evident and there is meaningful interaction between newcomers and the host community.

Hamilton has welcomed thousands of immigrants over the past century and most of these newcomers have made Hamilton their permanent home. There are numerous programs and services both formal and informal that provide support to newcomers. Yet, there is still evidence that newcomers experience culture shock, discrimination, feel unwelcomed and face many barriers when they come to live in Hamilton. They also encounter many challenges in their attempt to become part of mainstream institutions and seek representation on decision-making bodies.

“Newcomers are not yet partners at the public and institutional levels.”
(Settlement Service Provider)

The lack of information about immigrants and the importance of immigration can lead to misconceptions, stereotypes and public anxieties. Indeed, the newcomers shared their experiences of discrimination from employers and service providers. They relayed numerous stories of how their ideas have been discounted, their requests for assistance ignored and access to opportunities denied because of their language and/or appearance.

Many of the newcomers also said they felt excluded from decision-making processes even when the decisions are related to meeting their needs through the provision of services to newcomers. Local institutional practices such as research and consultations, dissemination of information, outreach activities, recruitment for committees and boards and advertising for jobs or programs, are just some of the processes the newcomers identified from which they feel they are excluded.

The newcomers also face barriers to participation in recreational programs due to costs, language, location and unfamiliarity with the process such as how to register and what equipment is required. This leaves newcomers feeling frustrated and unwelcomed. The newcomers expressed a desire to be involved in any consultation processes to be able to provide input into planning, developing and utilizing the city's social, recreational and community facilities.

11.0 Coordination and Promotion

“Anti-oppression policies that ‘tolerate’ immigrants are unacceptable” (Female Newcomer)

It was clear through the consultations with newcomers and services providers that there is a need for employers and the general public to recognize the importance of and support newcomers and not just “tolerate” them. What is needed is a coordinated and collective approach to increase the awareness of the talents and skills of newcomers and to meet their needs.

Services and programs for immigrants and refugees are offered by various levels of government and by numerous formal and informal service providers. There are many networks and collaboratives in Hamilton whose focus is immigration, but the newcomers and service providers consulted indicated there needs to be more collaboration among all the providers, local institutions, community initiatives and newcomer communities. For example, health care is a provincial responsibility, however, language services are the responsibility of the federal government. It is therefore unclear who is responsible for funding cultural interpreters essential for the effective health care of newcomers. Also at issue is the availability of accurate information about employment opportunities prior to emigrating to Hamilton. Again, it is not clear where the responsibility for this lies and when and how this information can be disseminated. What is clear, however,

is that the newcomers consulted feel as though they had been misinformed about the employment opportunities in Hamilton.

The newcomers also noted the need for coordination between the formal service sector and the informal settlement sector. Currently, there is very limited interaction between the formal settlement service system and neighbourhood associations, business improvement associations, other local community organizations, ethno-cultural groups and faith communities.

It was evident throughout the consultations that there exists a strong desire among the newcomer communities to be more engaged, empowered and supported so that they can achieve their full potential. The newcomers said they would benefit greatly from more open communication between government, private sector and the community.

12.0 Conclusion

The consultations revealed that newcomers to Hamilton believe the city has much to offer in terms of location, services, quality of life and support. They came to Hamilton with the intent of making the most of the opportunities for growth and employment. However, once here they have found they are faced with many barriers. They have been forthright in identifying some of the challenges and gaps they have experienced and insightful in suggesting potential solutions that would help them to become fully engaged and contributing members of this community.

What follows is a summary overview of the issues and barriers faced by newcomers as described in this report based on consultations with over 400 newcomers and service providers in Hamilton in preparation for the development of Hamilton’s Immigration Strategy.

13.0 Summary Overview

Employment

Issue	Solution
Lack of Canadian Work Experience	Information given by immigration office prior to immigrants arriving to Hamilton
	Employers who are willing to hire without Canadian experience
	Unpaid work placements
	Incentives to employers for hiring newcomers
Difficulty in knowledge transfer to new labour market	Communicating with a professional employed in Hamilton in the same field

	Job Shadowing Opportunities
Lack of accurate information about employment opportunities prior to coming to Canada	More information provided to the informal sector
	Accurate information by Immigration officers(?)
Lack of information about employment opportunities that match skills and qualifications	Better use of ethnic media
Lack of information about qualifications and credentialing in various professions	Easily accessible information re the assessment and credentialing process
Lack of affordable child care while job seeking or working	Affordable child minding services
Lack of understanding about Canadian workplace norms, expectations and practices	Mentoring, informal information and discussions and new programs
Discrimination in hiring procedures	Education and spreading awareness among business owners and hiring firms
No information or support for self-employment and entrepreneurship	Tax-breaks on new businesses
	Retired professionals in various occupations to offer advice

Settlement Services

Issue	Solution
Lack of awareness about services offered, including dissemination issues	Information to informal sector
Lack of accessibility of services (transportation and child-minding)	
Stigmas that surround formal "services" and "authorities"	
Lack of complete services inventory (formal and informal)	
SISO not able to respond to diverse needs	
Need for collaboration between settlement sectors and within sectors through various initiatives	

Language Training

Issue	Solution
Language Training opportunities are limited	More awareness of need for varied language programs
Access to language training denied to those with permanent status	Policy change needed
Huge diversity in the classroom in terms of language proficiency	Manage smaller classes more specific to language ability
	More training for settlement and integration staff, training for ESL and LINC teachers,
Difficult to attend day classes for parents, especially mothers	Child minding services accompanying language classes
LINC certification does not hold significance in community due to awareness	Build and use collaboration with ESL and LINC classes

Education

Issue	Solution
Lack of sufficient information regarding available programs	
Limited facility in English, inhibits participation in mainstream classes	
Limited finances create barriers to entry	
Lack of programs that bridge and build gaps from education or skills attained abroad	
Lack of consistency in assessment or grading schemes	
Youth face discrimination in schools	
Need for affordable and advanced language training	

Health Care

Issue	Solution
General lack of accessibility to qualified health care service professionals	
Inadequate care due to language barriers	Free Interpretation and Translation services

	Provide training to immigrants who speak different languages.
Access to culturally competent/proficient health care	
Dealing with loss, trauma, stress and grief	Counselors who specialize in this area and have access to required resources
	Training for settlement and integration staff, training for ESL and LINC teachers
Information about subsidies for various devices etc	Program for educating newcomers how to best access health and health information and participate in treatment decisions. (in different modalities and languages)

Housing and Urban Planning

Issue	Solution
Lack of affordable housing and awareness of affordable housing units	Provide information
Eligibility requirements	Educate landlords
Development of ethno-cultural communities with low-income which can become "ghettoized"	Urban planning including affordable units in geographically accessible areas, include variety in neighbourhoods
Safe environment	Education on rights of the tenants

Culture and Recreation

Issue	Solution
Lack of access to accurate information regarding available programs and facilities	
Lack of programs and facilities	
Access to information through the informal sector	
Need for specific programs for women and youth	
Need child minding services during cultural and recreational events to enable participation	

Transportation

Issue	Solution
Lack of Affordable transportation	Subsidized public transportation (especially for employment and meeting basic needs)
Lack of Accessible transportation (times, location of stops)	Collaboration between immigrant settlement services and urban planners to re-map areas of greatest need as well as map new geographies that require service
Do not have licenses	Promote alternative transportation mechanisms for various neighbourhoods
Do not have the language skills	
Can not afford private vehicles	
Need safe neighbourhoods to facilitate walking, biking and other forms of transit	

Information and Awareness

Issue	Solution
Various institutions and important sectors of the Hamilton community are unaware of skills and education of immigrants	Advertise settlement services overseas, at ports of entry, embassies
Immigrants need to be able to access information with ease, in a timely manner	Welcome committee and events when newcomers first arrive
	"Ambassadors" to ethnic community events and places of worship
	Make use of mainstream and media

Inclusive and Welcoming Community

Issue	Solution
Denied opportunities for employment	Education and promotion of issues faced by newcomers and their contributions.
Culture shock and discrimination	Anti-oppression training to employers
	Create opportunities for various cultural groups to interact with mainstream organizations
	Cultural Interpretation /translation services For health, legal and other needed

	services
	Outreach to various ethno-cultural communities so they are invited and welcomed to participate on decision making bodies

Coordination and Promotion

Issue	Solution
Lack of awareness and understanding about cultural norms and practices in Canada	Informal and formal means of sharing information about Canadian cultural norms/ practices
Disjointed programs, overlapping services, major gaps in services	More structured opportunities for the formal and informal settlement services to communicate and collaborate
Gaps in funding due to separation between formal and informal sectors	Collaboration on projects to maximize funding and minimize disjointed projects

Endnotes

ⁱ Makkath, Sabin and Don Jaffray (2006). “Report on the Immigrant Skills Workforce Integration Project: A Plan for Hamilton”. Social Planning Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) with funding from the Hamilton Community Foundation.

ⁱⁱ Shaffir, W., and Satzewich, V. (2010). The Informal Settlement Sector: Broadening the Lens to Understand Newcomer Integration in Hamilton. (p.11). For the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council.

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada. (2005). “Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada: A Portrait of Early Settlement Experiences”.

^{iv} Wayland, Sarah V. (2010). “Immigrant Services in Hamilton: Capacity Study.” For the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council.

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