



Results of the Consultations on Hamilton's Immigration Strategy

March 2010



The Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council



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I - INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary overview of the consultations undertaken in Hamilton (up to March 31, 2010) with newcomers and other key stakeholders in the City in the development of the local immigration strategy and action plan.

A total of 12 focus groups were held with specific immigrant and refugee communities, including youth and women.

In addition numerous presentations, meetings and consultations have been undertaken with leaders of faith groups, residents of neighbourhood hubs, settlement and services agencies, union leaders, academia, members of the City staff and City Council. A total of 386 members of the community have participated in these discussions.

In addition, recent surveys with newcomer communities in Hamilton have been undertaken by other key partners in the City, including for example, the Immigration Portal and Mohawk College. The results of these consultations have also been incorporated in this report.

II - METHODOLOGY

One of the underlying objectives of the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council's workplan over the last eight months has been to identify any overlapping and duplication of efforts. With regard to undertaking local consultation, a number of community events, surveys, reports and consultations on immigration and settlement related issues have been undertaken in Hamilton in recent years. Much of this has been documented and captured in reports such as:

- Connecting the Dots: Immigrant Employment in Hamilton (Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network, Sarah Wayland, Sept. 2007)
- Hamilton Community Profile (Trillium Foundation, 2008)
- Community Services for new immigrants and refugees (Hamilton Training Advisory Board, Simone Saunders, June 2005)
- HR Matters: Hamilton Human Resource Strategy Business Plan (June 16, 2003)
- Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Police Infrastructure Renewal 2006)
- Hamilton Diversity Scan (Hamilton Community Foundation, September 2008)
- TOP: Planning for Prosperity 2009 (Hamilton Training Advisory Board, 2008)

In addition to this Hamilton specific data, a rich source of information that can be usefully applied to the Hamilton situation exists in a number of provincial and national studies, including for example:

- Immigration and Diversity in Canadian Cities (FCM 2009)
- Consultations on the Settlement and Language Training needs of Newcomers (CIC 2006)

In addition to the existing body of information that is available, there are also a number of significant community consultation initiatives in Hamilton that are currently being completed:

- Focus Group results re immigrant information needs in Hamilton (Immigration Portal)
- Survey of experience and needs of recent immigrants to Hamilton. One hundred in depth interviews (Immigration Portal/SISO)
- Development of immigrant audience profiles/personas (Immigration Portal)
- Position paper on importance of immigration to Hamilton and its economic prosperity (JPC)
- Profiles of immigrant success stories (JPC)
- Study of Host Program in Hamilton (CURA - Profs. V. Satzewich and W. Shaffir)

- Analysis of Hamilton's labour supply and labour demand needs (HTAB with City of Hamilton Economic Development and Community Service Divisions)

To reiterate, the above is just a sample of the considerable community discussions that have been undertaken around settlement issues. Hamilton is not starting from scratch. The first task of the staff of the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council was to therefore identify, collect, review and analyse the results of the local community consultation pertaining to settlement.

In partnership with the Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council also determined that it would be helpful to have a complementary piece of consultation with Hamilton's most recent newcomers including the Afro-Francophone, Arabic, Chinese, Hispanic, Iraqi, Karen and South Asian communities. In addition, in partnership with the Facilitating Inclusion Cooperative of the St. Joseph's Immigrant Women Center, focus groups were undertaken to gain a gendered perspective on the settlement experience.

A welcoming community is defined as one in which the contributions and achievements of immigrants are promoted, diversity is encouraged and celebrated, inclusively is regularly practiced, community cohesion is evident and there is meaningful interaction between newcomers and the host community.

To build a welcoming community in Hamilton, we asked the following questions in our focus group meetings from members of the recent newcomers: the Afro-Francophone, Arabic, Chinese, Hispanic, Iraqi, Karen and South Asian communities, immigrant youth and women groups and service providers:

1. Is Hamilton a welcoming community to immigrants and refugees? Do you feel at home in Hamilton?
2. What are the good things about the city? What are the things that make you feel at home?
3. What are the things we need to improve in Hamilton? What are the things that don't?
4. What can we do in Hamilton to attract more immigrants to our City and to stay here? What does Hamilton need to do to make you feel at home?
5. What can be done to streamline services for newcomers?

The following is a brief summary of the major themes and recommendations arising from the discussions in response to these questions. It is presented under each of the four strategic priorities identified by the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council.

III - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

3 (a) Building Collective and Collaborative Leadership in Pursuit of Hamilton's Immigration Vision

The following issues emerged from the consultations and meetings.

- The existence of the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) and the commitment to develop a 'Made in Hamilton' Immigration Strategy has been positively received and garnered unanimous and strong support. Apart from 'it's about time' feedback, the only note of pessimism that tinges this positive support is the concern that this must not be another 'talk-fest' group with a report that sits on the shelf and is ignored.
- Community members and partners appreciated the importance of immigration to Hamilton, but they are looking to the Immigration Strategy and the Partnership Council to help guide and direct them as to the practical steps by which they can respond.
- Participants reinforced the importance of 'voice' and the community empowerment process. A number of newcomer respondents were surprised and appreciative of the fact that an organization such as the Immigration Partnership Council has been established in Hamilton and is actually interested in their concerns. Hamilton's immigrant population strongly feels that they need to be engaged and empowered.

Areas requiring actions:

That the Hamilton Immigration Strategy:

1. Assist in building awareness and the capacity of the community and the City to welcome and integrate newcomers.
2. Use the existing networks and collaboratives in Hamilton to inform the public about the education, skills as well as poverty levels among newcomers.
3. Position and connect Hamilton's future with the successful integration of immigrants by engaging citizens, businesses, entrepreneurs, students, and community members.
4. Advocate for opening a credential assessment centre in Hamilton for faster credentials recognition of immigrant professionals.
5. Advocate for reducing the ten year sponsorship requirement by immigration Canada for older newcomers.

6. Advocate for improved human services needs for newcomers and to ensure the associated equity and access issues, processes and methods are in place.
7. Encourage City councilors, MPs and MPPs to lobby with their counterparts at various levels of government to enhance support and services for newcomers.

3 (b) Creating a Welcoming Community and thereby the Conditions that Encourage Immigrants to both Settle and Stay in Hamilton

- The majority of the newcomer participants are proud of Hamilton, such as the sense of community, availability of low-rent and affordable housing, good healthcare, education, the size and location of Hamilton, its waterfall, parks environment and diversity.
- Respondents felt that the example of the peaceful, positive and united response of the people of Hamilton from all walks of life in favour of SISO's New Dawn and opposed to the hateful flyer distributed in February 2010 shows that the Hamilton community has a unity of purpose in creating a community that is responsible, safe and welcoming.
- However, the integration process is taking too long for many newcomers. As a newcomer service provider observed, Hamilton is a fully diverse community at street level but its mainstream agencies and institutions barely welcome refugees and immigrants from around the world. They are not readily absorbed into the social, political, economic and market fabric of our community. Most of the newcomers have a difficult time making the economic and cultural transition to life in Hamilton. She said:

.....one can easily capture the diversity of Hamilton in Eastgate Square Mall, downtown and public parks and schools but newcomers are not yet partners at the public and institutional levels.

- The Hamilton Association for Residential and Recreational Redevelopment Programs, Wesley Urban Ministries and Social Planning & Research Council (SPRC) continue to organize consultation meetings with residents and service providers in the neighbourhood hubs. The neighbourhood hubs initiative brings residents and service providers together in housing, recreation centres and places of worship. It is playing a significant role in welcoming new immigrants. They engage newcomers and residents through activities and events such as community kitchens, community gardens and parties in parks etc. These hubs can become a model of civic engagement, where newcomers can not only have access to healthcare, housing complexes, early education centre, schools and recreation information but be able to connect directly with host community and service providers to find opportunities of engagement, volunteerism, internships and access to jobs in their neighbourhoods.
- For example in the Riverdale neighbourhood hub, SPRC, Immigrant Women Centre, Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Today's Family have created a partnership to increase the number of

licensed home childcare providers among newcomers women. The program has provided many women the opportunity to run and manage their own childcare business in their homes. The program has created many childcare spaces and many parents are able to work.

Areas requiring actions:

That the Hamilton Immigration Strategy:

8. Advocate for broader and more inclusive consultation processes by public institutions when consulting on planning, developing and usage of the City's social, recreational and community facilities, undertaking research and surveys, as well as in the training of staff.
9. Help build trust-based relationships and ensure two-way and timely communication among the immigrant and host communities and institutions to address challenges newcomer face, recognize newcomers' achievements and identify future action plans.
10. Advocate for a protocol to be adopted by various sectors, institutions and the City to fully utilize the human and social capital that new immigrants bring to the City.
11. Encourage all levels of government to create conditions for utilizing the talents of immigrant artists, cultural workers and people in sports as a business case to attract foreign art, culture, films and games to Hamilton in developing a welcoming community and vibrant economy.
12. Encourage members of the City Council to organize receptions upon newcomers' arrival to Hamilton.
13. Advocate for more resources and funds to the neighbourhood hubs to create a welcoming and vibrant community.
14. Encourage the City to support licensed home childcare providers program and micro-lending programs among newcomer women.
15. Encourage the compilation of information at neighbourhood level to identify local demographics, including recent immigration as well as local services.

3 (c) Strengthening the Delivery of Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Services

- Most newcomers are pleased with Hamilton's well established settlement sector. However, they see that settlement, integration and inclusion is a long process. Inclusion in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the city is an ongoing challenge.
- Newcomers reported that the settlement agencies provide better services in meeting their early settlement needs such as finding a school for children, opening a bank account and accessing language classes. However, immigrants and refugees still face challenges in finding jobs, affordable housing, access to social services, and developing social networks for support.
- A number of staff from mainstream social service agencies noted that settlement agencies provide 'other services' such as health care, financial management advice, computer classes etc, although they do not have adequate funds or the mandate to offer such services.
- A number of participants noted that that an organized inventory of settlement services is not available in Hamilton.
- Some newcomer participants expressed concern that settlement workers are not clear regarding boundaries of professionalism and confidentiality issues. In some cases cited, the settlement workers get involved with their clients on personal and emotional levels while providing them services. The workers sometimes share home phone numbers with their clients. They invite each other to parties. It sometimes leads to dual relationships among the workers and clients. There have been cases of workers referring their clients to mental health services and sharing their client's information with other community members. In most of the dual relationship situations, it is inevitable that workers are unable to objectively serve their clients.
- A considerable number of newcomer refugees indicated that the settlement sector is providing mandatory services to refugees during their first year of settlement. As per their contract with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), refugees are required to use the settlement services such as mandatory language instructions or job search assistance to continue receiving their rent payment and some basic allowances. Most of the time, refugees do not use the settlement services after their contract is finished with the federal government.

- Newcomer youth have indicated that the traditional service delivery model used by the settlement sector to inform and educate the newly arrived refugee parents about their rights and responsibilities as Canadian residents is not working for them. The settlement agencies assume that parents will pass on the information to their children. Youth indicated that their parents are still in cultural shock while receiving long orientations, lectures and a great deal of information during their first two weeks of arrival. They are unable to comprehend the critical information. The provision of information through interpreters makes the situation more complex.

- Old models of working ‘for’ youth are not working. The settlement sector and mainstream service providing agencies need to partner ‘with’ youth to create programs for youth. We need to solve 21st century’s issues with the knowledge and solutions of 21st century and not with the 20th century structures.

- Refugee youth noted that the settlement workers inform them only about low-level labour jobs. They do not connect them with information about jobs at banks, or in the service or corporate sectors. They also fail to inform them about the admission processes at colleges and universities and the students’ grants and loans programs available.

- Housing is a significant concern raised in the community consultations where 50.5% newcomers live below the low income cut-off (LICO) in Hamilton.

- Renting an apartment or buying a home requires credit history, co-signers, and reference letters from employers which many newcomers have difficulty in providing.

- With many battling poverty, newcomers are moving into high-rise apartment buildings in downtown and the east end of Hamilton. The quality of rental accommodation is sometimes substandard. As one focus group participant noted:

“...these apartment buildings are poorly maintained. we sometime use neighbours’ washrooms for weeks while waiting for repair. Most of these buildings are filled with pests such as mice and cockroaches, which creates an unhealthy living condition....”

- Another priority area for newcomers is their children's education. Participants discussed the hardships that youth and children are facing in our education system. One of the main concerns is establishing an appropriate assessment tool based on a child or youth's needs when they begin schooling.
- Refugee children and youth, for example, often come directly from camps where they had no or limited access to formal education. Once they arrive into their new home, they are admitted to schools on the basis of their age instead of their scholastic and cognitive abilities. They face significant academic challenges that most often lead to non completion of education while competing with children who have been promoted on the basis of skills. One youth shared her experience:

“.....once I had an exam. I did not know much English and every time I tried to ask for help, the teacher told me don't talk during exam. I did not do very well on the exam because I did not know what the question meant!....”

- Newcomer participants were generally satisfied with the Canadian healthcare system. However, challenges in finding family doctors and accessing healthcare services were noted.
- Newcomer participants liked Hamilton's public transportation services but noted that the service is expensive and is not available in some neighbourhoods such as Queenston Road in the east end of Hamilton and the Hamilton Mountain. Issues of affordability and accessibility to public transport are particularly important for newcomers to facilitate their settlement process.
- The informal settlement sector consists of families, friends, faith groups and ethnocultural community groups and organizations. These large and extensive community infrastructures provide a vital settlement and integration role.

Areas requiring actions:

That the Hamilton Immigration Strategy:

16. Address the need to improve pre-migration and arrival information available to all classes of migrants, including employment opportunities and labour adjustment issues.

17. Newcomers be given the necessary information about local services such as shelters, food banks, schools, and subsidies towards sports, recreation and housing in appropriate formats.
18. Settlement and social services agencies be provided with information about the war traumas experienced by many immigrants and especially refugees to Hamilton and the impact of such trauma on newcomer children and women, to consider various coping/healing strategies and learn about the existing community resources in order to provide essential and appropriate information and referral.
19. Settlement services providing agencies improve their professional and organizational competencies in the areas of case management, information and referral provisioning, community development and networking, cultural competence development, advocacy, program planning and evaluation.
20. Service providers improve their knowledge of the full range of settlement services in Hamilton such as access to appropriate training (language, bridging programs), assessment of credentials and access to trades and professions.
21. Mainstream service institutions and agencies such as education, healthcare, housing, and the Chamber of Commerce review their client and staff demographics to plan and deliver appropriate programs in consultation with newcomers.
22. Encourage all levels of government to provide enhanced services to newcomers in health, education, art, culture, sports and recreation etc.
23. Encourage the City of Hamilton to engage the immigrant community in the provision of information about public health, social housing and special support programs etc.
24. Encourage the City to focus on attraction and retention of newcomers to accommodate a projected population of 700,000 by 2031 as envisaged in Hamilton's Growth Related Integrated Strategy (GRIDS) project.
25. Work with corporations and institutions to review their policies and practices to take full advantage of the skills and talents of newcomers.
26. Arrange information fairs and workshops for newcomers, entrepreneurs and professionals and initiate a micro-lending program.

27. Encourage Hamilton's business class immigrants to invest in Hamilton's food industry, education, tourism, import/export, healthcare and other high-tech industries.
28. Encourage immigrant students to develop entrepreneurship skills in high-tech sectors.
29. Encourage institutions and businesses to enhance their cultural understanding of the immigrant population in Hamilton.
30. Partner with colleges and universities for improved training and retraining programs for newcomers such as job-shadowing, bridging, co-op and mentorship programs. .
31. Encourage education and funding agencies to consider more flexible arrangements in the provision of Enhanced Language Training (ELT) and bridging programs that can accommodate people at different levels and different times of the day and night and that bridging programs be expanded to all professions.
32. Assess the supply of affordable homes, including larger dwellings and consider steps to improve temporary accommodation and routes to settled accommodation, training for front-line and managerial staff, monitoring standards in private rented accommodation, and the authority and capacity to intervene in the housing sector as necessary in the provision of high quality housing.
33. Hamilton school boards review the transition system for newcomer children and youth and the provision of English classes.
34. That the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) consider coverage of newcomers' health insurance upon their arrival and discard the initial three months eligibility and waiting time criteria.
35. With many newcomers living on limited incomes, they are eligible for subsidized dental care, vision care and Ontario drug plans. They need to be informed about these subsidies.
36. Healthcare providers ensure that appropriate supports such as translation or cultural interpretation services are available.
37. The informal settlement sector be recognized and supported for the important role they play in the settlement and integration of newcomers and be more closely connected to the 'formal' settlement sector and mainstream agencies.

3 (d) Creating and Disseminating Foundational Knowledge of Immigration and Immigrants in Hamilton

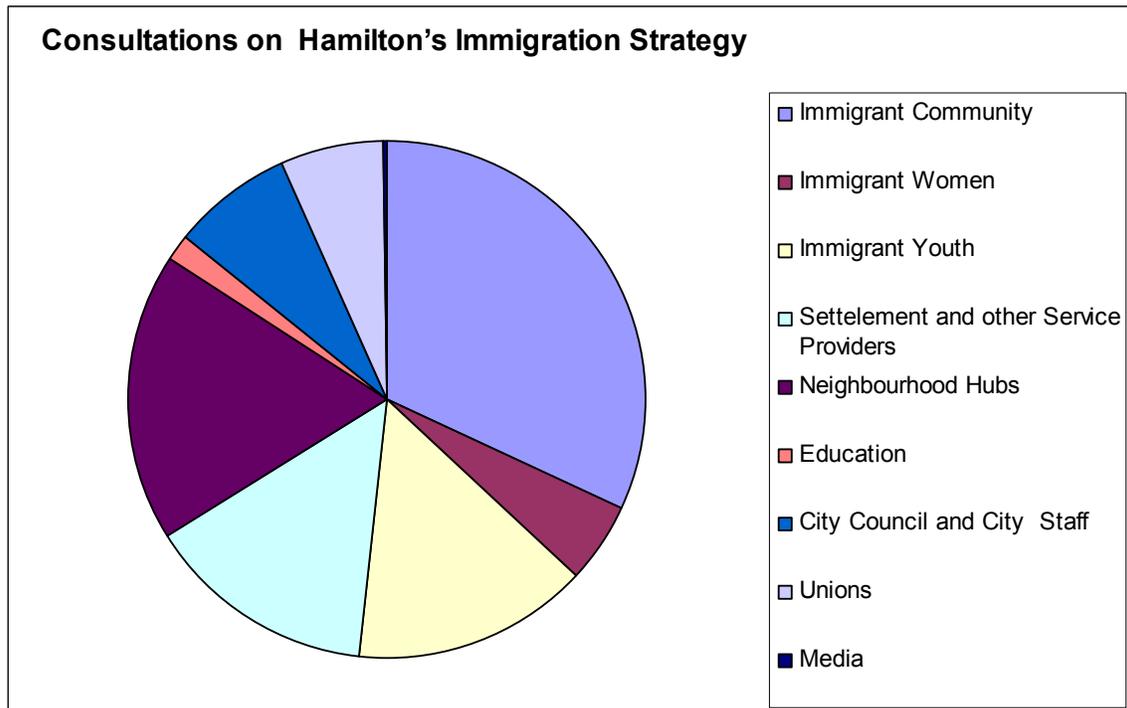
The issue of the development, provision and access to accurate, reliable and timely information needed by immigrants was emphasized repeatedly.

38. The digitized information available to the public through Hamilton Community Information, myHamilton of Hamilton Public Library, and the City immigration portal be more widely promoted and disseminated through different formats.

Appendix - A

Participants' Composition

Participants Category	# of Participants
Immigrant Community	123
Immigrant Women	20
Immigrant Youth	56
Settlement and other Service Providers	56
Neighbourhood Hubs	70
Education	6
City Council and City Staff	29
Unions	25
Media	1
Total	386



Appendix B

A Consultation with women from Immigrant and Refugee Community towards a 'Made-in-Hamilton Immigration Strategy (Focus group transcript) – March 2010 by Immigrant Women Center's Facilitating Inclusion Cooperative.

Appendix C

Moving towards a Made-in-Hamilton Immigration Policy - A transcript of phone interviews with service providers from the diverse community by Immigrant Women Center's Facilitating Inclusion Cooperative.

Appendix D

Consultation with Immigrant and Refugee Community members for Local Immigration Partnership Council by Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion.

Appendix E

Consultations Report on Hamilton Skilled Immigrants Focus Group Meeting and In-Depth 100 Interviews conducted for the City of Hamilton's Immigration Portal by Hendershot Research Consultants. (October 2009).

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