
**Immigration Planning and Visioning
Tuesday, February 7, 2006**

Group Discussions Summary Notes

Summary Notes of Group Discussions

Peel Community Newcomers Visioning Meeting

February 7, 2006

WHO TOOK PART

Some 136 individuals took part in the visioning exercise, around 20 tables. These included:

- 61 people from 33 generic “serving the general public” non-profit organizations. Some agencies were represented by as many as six people
- 21 people from the Region of Peel including 11 from the Department of Social Services
- 12 representatives of 7 settlement agencies, and 15 from 9 employment, training and career counselling agencies
- 8 representatives of federal agencies, 6 of them from Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- 3 representatives each from the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga including two Councillors’ Executive Assistants and staff from libraries and parks and recreation
- Two from Provincial agencies (Trillium and Community Care Access Centre)
- Six from the education sector, of whom 4 were from Sheridan College and one from the Peel District School Board
- Four self-employed business persons

WHAT THEY TOLD US

Visioning was the main focus of the workshop, in answer to this question:

The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement recognizes the development and implementation of a strategy that must support the successful social and economic integration of newcomers in Ontario. What is your vision for such a strategy?

Here is a preliminary draft “high level” statement of the vision reflected in the discussion around the tables:

Newcomers should be welcomed in Peel by a coordinated array of services with a single point of access that is easy to navigate, from the time of deciding to come to Canada, to well after arrival in Peel. The welcome should include supports for early entry into appropriate jobs, and this will take a consortium of government and non-profit agencies working with employers. Collaborative efforts at integrating newcomers into all aspects of community life would best be led by a central committee supported by a lead agency.

The components of the vision and the specific ideas offered up are summarized below, drawn from the notes taken at the tables.

COMMON THEMES (Vision)

Labour market and business engagement

- Labour Market Agreement – need for funders and community to break down barriers and assist with labour market. Work with employers to provide access to employment for skilled immigrants.
- Create a Job Bank specific for newcomers to link up to suitable jobs.
- Offer Government and Corporate sector incentives (i.e. money) for companies to employ immigrants.
- Develop a strategic plan approach to contact employers to hire skilled immigrants and work with them to identify barriers to them.
- Focus on Labour Market – businesses can lead us – strategic vision.
- Consortium of communication agencies, governments, and service providers to approach business with a common voice to support and promote the value of immigrants' skills.

Collaboration and Community Strategy

- Encourage and Enhance community partnerships to assist immigrants to better integrate into Peel - sharing services; mentoring groups to assist newcomers with basic life skills, banking).
- Centralize a Committee to look at what services are available within the community and streamline a process for identifying the services available to newcomers then create a catalogue of services available to newcomers.
- Provide information to newcomers prior to their arrival to Canada so they will know what to expect in Canada. Web portal in a centralized location can help facilitate this.
- Lack of Visioning and Leadership. We need to start breaking down bureaucracy to take us to where we are going; be one large cohesive group to identify how to overcome barriers.
- Have tailor made solutions to work with service providers (funding arrangements) who work with newcomers.
- Develop a formal program to help families with integration into the community. Develop a connection with the Airport to assist with links to community resources.

- Provide information on basic life skills for newcomers – encourage culturally correct data – strategy must be strength based. Refugee immigrants have different needs – recognize and service the best we can.
- A lead agency, preferably a government organization would convene a forum for service providers to exchange information, best practices and discuss common problems and issues.

Welcoming Newcomers to Live in Peel

- Have an alternate school system for older youth who are children of newcomers to assist with integrating in the community.
- Build better settlement services in high need areas (Meadowvale and Springdale).
- Communicate our support of immigration to the community and promote immigration within our community.
- Develop a zero tolerance racism policy within the immigration policy.
- Recognize prejudice.
- Encourage Newcomers to donate.
- Name Streets in Peel to make everyone feel welcome.
- Newcomers – provide them with an accurate picture of what to expect before they arrive to Canada.
- Relationship to newcomers – improve relationship between us, schools and service agencies.
- Change the way people thinks about newcomers – they are an asset to our community.
- Provide newcomers with a catalogue of community services that are available to them.

Government and Funding

- One-Stop Community Based Strategic Approach to link to government agencies e.g. HRSDC to focus on newcomers assets instead of their needs.

- Short funding timelines are a problem for referrals. Funding timeliness should be built within the infrastructure – have long term funding agreements between government and agencies.
- Funding – agencies compete for funding dollars.
- There is a lack of coordinated services (where school and community centres are).
- Bureaucracy needs to work together.

Pre-Settlement

- Settlement to begin before immigrants comes to Canada. Offer Settlement Services, language training, etc. before they come to Canada.
- Preparedness and Orientation for newcomers to better understand Canada to assist with “culture shock” and advise how they can access our services. We should understand the newcomer too as they all have different needs.
- Establish communication tools for communicating where newcomers can get our services. Provide pre-settlement services to newcomers for language assessment, education assessments before they come to Canada.
- Create one centralized web portal for immigration to Canada and encourage prospective newcomers to visit the site to find out about the immigration process, labour market needs, recognition of foreign credentials and work experience and language and educational requirements.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

The process began with group discussion of two initial questions:

- 1). What barriers/challenges are immigrants experiencing?
- 2). Other than financial resources, what barriers/challenges are service providers facing when delivering services to immigrants?

The responses from the group discussions are summarized below, grouped again by themes.

Barriers Experienced by Immigrants:

The simplest way of summarising the comments in this part of the discussion is to list the themes in descending order of frequency. Top issues were employment, cultural barriers, systemic issues (bureaucracy) and barriers to accurate information.

Employment: 33 comments, including 13 on accreditation

Cultural barriers: 25 comments, 12 of a general nature, the rest broken down by culture shock, acclimatization & adjustment, societal integration and inclusion.

Systemic issues: 22 comments, including the immigration process, access to services, legal issues and other systemic issues (bureaucracy).

Information issues: 22 comments including misinformation, lack of information and how information is disseminated.

Language: 16 comments

Access: 11 comments specifically about access to transportation, technology and recreation.

Lack of money (financial adjustment): 10 comments

Isolation and lack of networks: 9 comments

Dealing with disappointed expectations: 9 comments

Health, mental health and health care: 8 comments

Racism and discrimination: 6 comments

Refugee issues: 3 comments.

Challenges to Service Providers:

Again the themes are listed in descending order of frequency. Top issues were leadership, service integration, and education of staff about clients.

In order:

The need for better vision, planning and leadership, including best practices: 19 comments

The need for better service integration: 18 comments

The need for better education of staff about clients: 17 comments

Inadequate community services: 15 comments

Cross-cultural and language barriers (translation): 14 comments

Inadequate agency funding: 12 comments

The need for better marketing and outreach: 11 comments

Political and structural challenges: 8 comments

Specific labour market integration challenges: 4 comments

Lack of sufficient space: 3 comments.