

**COALITION ON RICHER DIVERSITY
(CORD)**

A Newfoundland & Labrador Diversity & Immigration Umbrella Organization

**A REPORT ON
FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES**

June 2007

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005, a group of interested people in the St. John's area began meeting to consider responses to the new social challenges resulting from an increase in volume and diversity among new residents. These interested people, from various immigrant groups in this province as well as service organizations such as education, health, housing, justice, employment, special needs and faith communities discussed the feasibility of forming an umbrella organization to work on diversity and immigration matters in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Since the province had recently announced its first immigration policy, it was anticipated that the formation of such a comprehensive coalition would be timely and provide significant direction in addressing a myriad of concerns through networking and consolidation. Such a group would share information and collaborate on projects. The goal would be to strengthen relationships between newcomers to the province and long-term Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans. It would analyze and improve current responses to problems and collaborate in providing an effective, unified response.

In May of 2007, individuals from the immigrant organizations and from the sectors mentioned above and interested in immigration matters, formed three focus groups to discuss how the formation of a Coalition for Diversity could support immigrants and refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The meetings were held on June 4, June 14 and June 19, from 7:30 to 9:30 and were led by external facilitators to ensure objectivity. Approximately forty participants discussed a variety of issues. Detailed notes were taken and are summarized below and provide a full synopsis of the responses gathered from the attendees during the sessions.

“Courage, my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.”

-Tommy Douglas

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED BY AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION

Topic 1: What Important Work Is Not Being Done?

Participant Responses:

Need concerning general information

- Need for more accessible information
- There is a need specifically for detailed information about various government services
- Need for translation/interpretation (keeping in mind literacy issues of some groups) of information on services relevant for immigrants
- Need continuous research on what resources are available, including realistic information on what the capabilities and capacities of organizations really are
- A lack of consistent information from a variety of agencies was identified

K to 12 and adult basic education

- Overall ESL resources are far too few and not necessarily meeting user needs
- People coming from a background of refugee camps, especially children with interrupted schooling need very special placement and services in school and training
- Various forms of tutoring help for immigrant children in school are essential (e.g., after school homework clubs, peer tutors, specially trained tutors for children with specific needs, etc.)
- ESL programs for adults are very limited in terms of the range of language learning help they can provide newcomers over a number of years as well as accessibility (fees, status, etc.)
- We need highly a sophisticated assessment process of their present needs including exceptionalities such as learning disabilities
- We also need suitable follow-up services for these people
- Use of gate-keeping tests (for English language or other skills) is haphazard and uncoordinated among institutions; there is little useful information about them, and few supports to help immigrants prepare for them

- Cultural learning as well as English language skills are a pre-requisite for immigrants to jump many hurdles, including passing tests
- Language and cultural learning opportunities are not available for specific workplace needs and other purposes
- School personnel have to deal with a great deal of extra paperwork for immigrant students
- Authorities need to recognize the extent to which issues faced by immigrant children in schools is growing and expanding
- Specific support is needed for parents in order for them to understand how the school system works and how they are expected to take part in it (what their role is)
- The concepts and programs for Adult Basic Education and ESL are being overlapped in ways that are not serving either training service

Health care

- Often new Canadians have no health records with them from their past or those records are hard to interpret
- Language and cultural barriers between clients and providers create many kinds of problems
- Problems with different cultural views of diagnosis
- Problems with translation services
- Health care professionals do not necessarily appreciate particular stresses on refugees
- Not enough general information or training of health care professionals before they get involved with immigrant or refugee clients
- Some doctors do not know how to approach immigrant clients
- Hard for immigrants to find a family physician they feel comfortable with
- Need pastoral care in hospitals from all the local religious groups
- Need respect in hospitals for ethnic and religious concerns about foods
- Need respect and understanding of the role of traditional medicine
- Health care services need appropriate resources for immigrant clients with specific needs

Legal issues

- Legal structures are highly culturally biased and very complex so it takes newcomers a long time to start to understand legal items, which are crucial to them

Employment

-Credentialing, accreditation and integration into the workforce are a major issue for immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador

- Most newcomer adults need to get onto a track towards employment but getting started on this is very difficult

- Professionals with special skills to work with immigrants are not being employed specifically to work with immigrants in various community services

- Professionals trained outside of Canada do not have access to information about how they can enter their profession in Canada

- Governments do not take into account how long and what it takes to integrate immigrant workers into the Canadian economy

- The needs and interests of immigrants who want to start their own businesses are neglected in this province

Family and housing

- Many immigrant women, especially those with small children, are isolated at home

- Immigrant families do not have their extended families around to help them, and they have no money to pay for help, so this becomes a poverty issue

- There is a need for childcare with ESL for parents and children and learning opportunities about other things as well (i.e. activities for children, relief for parents)

- Immigrant women really want this kind of help, and their role is crucial because they are at the center of the family

- Newer immigrants in particular need to know how to contact people of their own culture in the area/ community

- Language barriers create serious problems for immigrants in understanding their rights and responsibilities concerning their rental leases, etc.

- Need for support on technical matters (things like home heating are very different from the

immigrants' experiences)

- Fear keeps a number of immigrants from participating in programs, which might benefit them
- Parent must learn basic safety skills
- Adult/child roles get complicated, especially if the child speaks English better than the parent(s)
- Community shelters for women suffering abuse are under-supported as it is; immigrant clients add to the pressure and pose new challenges (interpretation, food, cultural practices); language and cultural differences mean that it is next to impossible for workers to help immigrant women particularly with their problems of violence in the home or community

Government approaches to immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador

- The rules of social systems in Canada are very complicated and culturally bound, so it takes immigrants a very long time to get to know how to get along in all aspects of society
- The local systems are not ready to serve immigrant needs
- Some of the relevant and important organizations concerning immigration do not get along with each other
- Offices of crucial services do not explain how the system works
- Newfoundland and Labrador has its work cut out for it in finding ways to keep newcomers in the province, and it does not have a lot of strategies or experience in doing this
- At the national level, immigrants are not encouraged to come to Newfoundland and Labrador
- Many refugees come here because they are sent here
- Complex, arcane rules about what immigrants, refugees, citizens and refugee claimants are entitled to, force organizations sometimes to hide what is going on
- Organizations such as MWONL (the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland & Labrador) have applied for funding for various social supports but there has been very little suitable response
- When social/community supports are not available, the resulting problems cost the system more in the long run (Prevention of problems as opposed to Treatment)
- Canadian immigration and training policies are focused almost completely on economic needs, but the services they support then miss the needs of the people they bring in (as well as those of other citizens); in other words; governments and local populations think only in terms of what is

in it for us?

- Canadian policies should also address the needs for the Canadian population to change to meet the new immigration reality
- The province should look at what attracts immigrants here as well as the barriers to their staying
- The province needs to recognize that looking after tourists is not the same thing as welcoming immigrants
- Problem of “passing the buck” between the province and the federal government

Waste of useful skills

- Professional skills of immigrants that could be useful in helping immigrants integrate or helping long-time residents understand immigrants are being wasted (i.e., social work skills and professional training)

Topic 2: Problems at the Social Root of the Community

Participant Responses:

Community context and atmosphere

- Local population needs a lot more awareness of the realities of immigrants
- Stereotyping of immigrants prevents them from being seen as individuals
- Immigrants are blamed for their own problems even if they are not responsible for those problems, and this is used as an excuse for not helping them
- Rumors, which circulate within the immigrant population, can easily spread “information” about Canada, which isn’t true
- Sometimes immigrants are discriminated against in terms of the answers they are given when they request information
- Some immigrants feel discriminated against on the basis of their race or even on account of their accent in English; some of those who speak English are discriminated against on account of their culture; issue of stereotypes
- Immigrants learn quickly and subtly that they are being discriminated against
- The relatively mono-cultural and mono-racial nature of Newfoundland and Labrador society tends to be ethno-centric
- The definition of what the mainstream culture (and even language) is always avoided
- It is very hard to make *friends* with long-term residents
- Long-term residents tend to create a power difference between themselves and immigrants by treating them as pitiful, of limited intelligence, and financially poor
- Immigrants want, on the one hand, to be treated as mature adults with rich backgrounds of experience and, on the other hand, that there be special services for the most vulnerable immigrant populations on account of the specific hardships they have encountered
- Long-term residents (individuals and organizations) find lots of excuses not to meet immigrants’ requests, and are often impatient with immigrants, especially those who have difficulty expressing their needs
- Long-term residents need to realize that they too have to change if immigration to this province

is to be successful

- Immigrants often cannot read between the lines to judge what the aim of a certain program or service is
- Issues related to immigrants are sometimes very different in cities and in rural areas
- Immigrants are grateful for the opportunity to live in Canada but do not want to spend their whole lives tied up in red tape, managed by public institutions, and seen as objects of charity

Issues with specific services

- Doctors' time is organized around the assumption of spending 15 minutes per patient per visit
- Legal structures are highly culturally biased and very complex so it takes newcomers a long time to start to understand legal items, which are crucial to them
- Some immigrants will not approach certain service providers because they fear discrimination
- Canadian professionals, such as doctors, are as liable as anyone else to have stereotypes about immigrants from specific backgrounds (e.g., assuming they have AIDS)
- Despite promises to the contrary, volunteer work on the part of immigrants rarely helps them to get into employed work
- Testing (e.g., Cantest, Canadian Language Benchmarks, and adult achievement tests) is misused in many situations due to a lack of understanding of different appropriate uses for them (gate keeping, placement, achievement, etc.)
- There needs to be more and better relationships with the private, business sector
- Need to include immigrants who have been here a long time

WHAT AN UMBRELLA GROUP MIGHT LOOK LIKE

Topic 3: Principles

Participant Responses:

- Celebrate diversity
- Inclusion is a value
- Pool resources
- Organize groups to act together
- Work to add value to what exists not compete with other services
- Be democratic
- Be useful and practical
- Advocate for immigrants
- Foster real friendship among immigrants, refugees and long-term local residents
- *Make use of existing resources among the immigrant community (such as professional skills)
- *Emphasize two-way, flexible education among immigrants and long-term residents
- Relationships under the umbrella are based on trust

Topic 4: Target Activities

Participant Responses:

Collaboration and networking

- Bring all immigrant groups together to collaborate and re-develop themselves
- Operate a centre to oversee all the umbrella group's activities, a safe haven where immigrants can come and ask their questions in comfort
- Identify resources, which exist in Newfoundland and Labrador and keep this list continually updated
- Create a fast, accurate and accessible way to give answers to questions about all kinds of services and who to contact
- Develop a collaborative, rather than competitive relationship among the immigrant-serving and other service organizations in order to serve immigrants well
- Continually keep reaching out to new organizations in the service and private sectors
- Provide for a range of ways of getting this information across with written "roadmaps" of services, lists of contacts, phone-in answers to questions, a website, public access computer help, counseling,

advertising special opportunities, etc.

- Work towards a streamlining of services relevant to immigrants rather than wasting resources on overlapping approaches
- Make a business plan

Research and advocacy

- Conduct research which highlights the needs and interests of the people most affected by immigration, and leads to fair and realistic solutions
- Monitor and evaluate specific problem issues ourselves, acting as an ombudsman's office
- Provide constructive and realistic input to policy-making processes
- Enlist proactive and energetic people to follow up on issues from research to policy to action
- Make governments and the private sector aware of their responsibility to support services to immigrants and the consequences if they do not
- Take a collaborative approach to working with governments rather than an adversarial one
- Ensure that projects that involve volunteers have suitable funding for recruitment, training and support for out-of-pocket expenses
- Aim to maximize value of projects by taking advantage of under-used resources

Education and awareness for the public, immigrant and policy makers

- Conduct public awareness activities and provide information
- Provide various forms of education on intercultural living to the public, immigrants, and policy makers
- Communicate in many forms such as a newsletter, a website, through the media, involvement with public events, etc.
- Work with funders and many kinds of organizations to see that continual cultural sensitivity training is provided

Coordinated services for immigrants

- *Create a service of advocates to negotiate between individual immigrants/refugees and social services
- Create a service of long-term mentoring, connections and contacts for credentialing and training for immigrants
- Conduct on-going research on models used in other provinces for dealing with issues facing immigrants (e.g., British Columbia program to connect skilled workers with suitable work in Canada for

survival jobs with apprenticeship; Ontario Welcome House for a centralized range of services to immigrants)

- Create projects to develop supports for immigrants who want to start their own businesses through collaboration with the university, the Chamber of Commerce, ACOA and other organizations
- On-going work to coordinate and greatly expand accessible and relevant ESL training for adult and child immigrants for at least the first decade of their stay in the province
- Coordinate and advise on a program of home-school workers to link schools to immigrant families effectively
- Coordinate and advise on tutoring supports for immigrant children

Topic 5: Possible Structure of Umbrella Organization

Participant Responses:

- A collective of the member organizations and individuals
- Some central staff to conduct core services (e.g., maintain the centre space, maintain the information dissemination and gathering service, provide basic support for research projects, be the secretariat for the operation of the umbrella organization)
- A board with a chairperson
- Standing committees (e.g., health, justice, child education, adult education, public education, housing and parenting, etc.) and ad hoc committees (e.g., overseeing specific projects)

Topic 6: Available Sources of Support

Participant Responses:

- To make a business plan, sources of support include YMCA business consultants, Business Metropolitan Opportunities, federal government NLOC funding, Business Services Centre
- Status of Women Canada could help to get support to get immigrant women together and break their isolation

Topic 7: Possible Organizations to Be Part of the Umbrella

Participant Responses:

The following list includes groups, which have taken part in the focus group process. However, a goal for a future umbrella group would be to continue to expand this list of collaborators as awareness grows and times change. The intention is as much to get regular service providers to collaborate with each other on immigration work, as it is to get immigrant groups to work with them.

- Refugee Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC)
- Multicultural Women's Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MWONL)
- Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Child and Youth (CCICY)
- Association for New Canadians (ANC)
- African Canadian Association (ACA)
- Community Services Council (CSC)
- Daybreak Parent Child Centre
- Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs
- Seniors' Resource Centre
- Atlantic Metropolis Centre
- ACOA
- Housing
- Police
- Courts

Topic 8: What NOT to do

Participant Responses:

- No more useless monster competing organizations
- Avoid asking for help from organizations, which will not serve non-citizens or, alternatively, citizens

Topic 9: Specific Recommendations

Participant Responses:

- Refugee and immigrant clients need an advocate to negotiate between them and health care professionals
- Make a list of how and where to get various kinds of food and provide accompanied shopping trips and cooking lessons
- More use of Prior Learning Assessment might be part of the solution to problems with testing and access to credentials and training

CONCLUSION

The focus groups helped the Steering Committee gain a clearer picture of what needs to be done and what an umbrella organization should look like. The participants were enthusiastic and excited to have a forum to voice their concerns. They were able to discuss relevant issues and mention their own experiences. The need for an umbrella organization to deal with the various issues raised was strongly identified.

The importance of collaboration, that long time residents work along with government agencies, community organizations and new Canadians, to enrich the experience for all was emphasized.

The main criticism was that the focus group meetings were not long enough to discuss everything and to come up with relevant activities, proposals, etc. This criticism and the identified need to form a new umbrella organization, geared plans for a meeting of all interested groups and individuals for the fall of 2007 to begin work on creating the coalition.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead

Appendix

INVITATION –Sent by email May 11, 2007

Hello people interested in immigration matters in Newfoundland and Labrador.

A number of people from a wide range of interest groups in this province (e.g., education, health, housing, justice, employment, special needs, faith communities, and so on) have been talking together about forming an umbrella group to share information and collaborate on projects to strengthen relationships between newcomers to the province and long-term Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans, to analyze current ways of doing things for gaps and problems, and to collaborate on projects to make these relationships work better. The province has recently announced its new immigration policy (<http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/immigration/pdf/strategydoc-mar07.pdf>), so we anticipate that there will be a growing need for understanding and enrichment of services in many ways.

Three focus groups are planned for the evenings of June 4th, June 14th and June 19th (7:30 to 9:30 p.m.). You are invited to come on ONE of these dates to discuss your views about addressing the impact of immigration for both immigrants and long-time residents. You are invited to come as an interested individual rather than as a representative of any organization. Also, the form of a possible future umbrella organization to do this work will be discussed.

The discussion will be facilitated. Notes will be taken, and a core group of interested people will analyze what people said, and come up with a report summarizing all three discussions. If there is interest in forming a new umbrella organization, then plans will be made for a meeting of all interested groups and individuals in the fall to create the organization.

At present, we have not finalized the place for the focus groups, but it will be somewhere in downtown St. John's, accessible and with adequate parking facilities. We will let you know the place soon.

Please e-mail Dr. Veeresh Gadag (vgadag@hotmail.com) if you would:

(1) like to come and (2) for which evening you would like to come.

Please forward this invitation to anyone you think might be interested.

Many thanks for your interest,

Barbara Burnaby
John Kamara
Jose Rivera
Lloydetta Quaicoe
Mona Wall
Veeresh Gadag