

# A needs-based model for settlement service delivery for newcomers to Canada

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Major population shifts are taking place throughout the world. Some of these movements are unplanned as in the mass movements of refugees from war-torn areas. Others are planned, as in immigration flows to countries that have an active immigration program. Canada is one of the few countries in the world that actively recruits immigrants and has an immigration program that accepts both immigrants and refugees. The availability of adequate settlement services to meet the needs of newcomers is critical to the resettlement process. This article reports the findings of a study to determine a model for appropriate settlement services for newcomers to Canada.

The first section provides a brief overview of the immigration to Canada; the second section provides a short review of literature on models of service delivery to newcomers; the third section describes the study; and the fourth section describes the proposed new model of settlement service. A more inclusive term ‘newcomer’ will also be used in this article to refer to both landed immigrants and refugees.

## Overview of trends in Canadian immigration

In the 1880s the Canadian government encouraged immigration mainly from European countries. Although Chinese and South Asian people were recruited to meet the labour needs of the country, restrictive immigration policies were imposed to control the entry of

'undesirable' and 'unassimilable' immigrants (Bolaria and Li, 1988). These trends continued even after the end of the Second World War. As Henry et al. (1995) stated: 'In summarizing Canada's immigration policy until 1967, one can say that the policy divided the world's population into two parts: preferred immigrants, who were of British and European stock and white; and the rest of the world, largely composed of people of colour' (Henry et al., 1995: 75).

A number of factors led Canada to drop its discriminatory immigration policies: a decrease in the number of European immigrants, the increased need for skilled workers and internal and international pressure to change discriminatory immigration laws. Canada's Immigration Act of 1978 was significant in that it 'opened the door to immigrants from areas that for the past 200 years had been largely excluded – Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa' (Henry et al., 1995: 75).

Prospective immigrants are classified into three broad categories: economic, social and humanitarian. These categories formed the basis for the three current classes of immigrants: economic immigrants, family-class immigrants and sponsored refugees. A point system was introduced to assess the suitability of a prospective immigrant under the economic class. The nine criteria used to assess the prospective immigrant's chances of successful integration are: age, occupational demand, vocational preparation, arranged employment, location, education, relatives in Canada, official language competence and personal suitability. In addition, the Domestic Workers' Program was established in 1995 to address the shortage of workers who were prepared to accept low-wage work (Henry et al., 1995).

Immigration levels for each class are determined annually by the federal government, at the recommendation of the minister responsible for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, for all provinces except for the province of Quebec. From 1990 to 1998, Canadian annual immigration figures ranged from a high of 256,257 in 1993 to a low of 174,100 in 1998 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1999).

In the past 20 years two major shifts have taken place in Canadian immigration patterns. The majority of immigrants to Canada are currently coming from non-European source countries. For example, in 1986, only 4.8 percent of the immigrants were from Africa; but in 1998 20.3 percent were from that region. In 1986 the USA ranked first in the list of source countries; in 1998, it ranked ninth.

The 10 top source countries in 1998 were: China, India, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Philippines, Taiwan, Iran, Republic of Korea and Russia (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).

The changes in the annual plans for immigration since 1996 have favoured more immigrants in the economic class, that is, applicants who are assessed using the point system. In 1996, family-class immigrants formed 30 percent of the total number of immigrants, and economic immigrants formed 53 percent of all immigrants to Canada. The figures for 1988 are 29 percent and 55 percent and for 1999 are 27 percent and 58 percent respectively (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).

More than 50 percent of the total immigrants to Canada settle in Ontario. In 1986, Toronto received about one-third of all the immigrants to Canada and 66.3 percent of immigrants to Ontario. These figures increased to 42.3 percent and 79.4 percent respectively in 1998. According to 1996 census data, approximately 48 percent of the population of the city of Toronto were immigrants in 1996. In 2001 foreign-born residents were in the majority in the city of Toronto. Approximately 42 percent of the immigrant population speak neither of the official languages upon arrival (Rees, 1998).

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provides funding for settlement services to new immigrants. The Ontario division of CIC is known as the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS). OASIS administers a number of settlement programs, including the Immigrant Adaptation and Settlement Program (ISAP), Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), HOST and the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP). ISAP includes such settlement activities as information and referral, orientation, interpretation, translation, settlement counselling and assistance in obtaining vocational or trade certification. LINC is an innovative program that is designed to teach newcomers English or French and simultaneously orient them to life in Canada. The HOST Program is a befriending program in which newcomers are matched with Canadians to help them adapt to Canadian life. The Refugee Assistance Program provides financial assistance for initial settlement needs for government-sponsored refugees during the first year of their stay in Canada.

Non-profit community agencies, primarily ethno-specific agencies, are contracted by OASIS to provide settlement services. Funding is allocated on the basis of the number of arrivals from a source country and on the number of arrivals who do not speak one of

Canada's official languages. ISAP follows what could be described as a cohort qualification model, in that only new immigrants, generally within the first three years of their arrival, are eligible for services, although there are no clear directives to this effect. ISAP is accessible only to family-class and economic-class immigrants and sponsored refugees. Refugee claimants, who after arriving in Canada apply for permission to stay in the country, are not eligible for ISAP services. The term 'landed immigrant' is used to indicate the legal status of family-class and economic-class immigrants and sponsored refugees. Landed immigrants can apply for Canadian citizenship after they fulfil residency requirements in Canada, usually after a period of three years.

### **Literature review**

Issues related to providing settlement services to newcomers have been the focus of studies in countries such as Australia (Gangualy, 1995; Waxman, 1998), the UK (Robinson, 1998), the USA (Shaw, 1998), Israel (Eliav, 1994) and Canada (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). All of these studies present ways to assist newcomers to their country to adapt and integrate into their new society.

According to the Canadian Council for Refugees, the goal of settlement services is 'to facilitate the full and equal participation of newcomers in Canadian society' (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). The settlement process can be seen as a bi-directional process in which both newcomers and the host society undergo adjustments. Settlement services have also been described as human rights, and thus it could be seen as incumbent on host societies to provide such services (Clark, 1997).

Several values that inform best practices in settlement service delivery are: inclusivity, empowerment of newcomers, holistic approach, respect for newcomers, cultural sensitivity, community development, collaboration, reliability of services and accountability. Some settlement indicators are: entering the labour market, and voting and acquiring a new social network. Indicators of long-term integration include career advancement, participation in social movements and access to institutions (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998).

Literature on models of settlement service delivery for newcomers can be broadly divided into two types: theoretical models and practice-based models. Theory-based models can be further divided into two categories. The first category consists of broad models, such as

cultural competence models, anti-racist models, ecological or eco-systems models and empowerment approaches, which generally can be applied to all services to immigrant and minority communities. In the second category are those models which refer specifically to different stages of immigrant adaptation.

The ecological model is useful in that it encourages researchers and practitioners to consider the complex interplay of individual, group and societal forces on the experiences of newcomers (Hicks et al., 1993). Closely related to the ecological model is the prevention and health promotion model (McLellan, 1997; Hyun, 1995; Land et al., 1988; Ganguly, 1995; Ervin, 1994). McLellan (1997) critiques the cohort qualification model and argues for ongoing support for newcomers through multi-service community health centres. The eco-systems model advanced by Morales is described as the most appropriate one for working with newcomers from third-world countries. The model emphasizes the need to recognize the realities of neo-colonialism and institutional racism and to work at both the individual and systemic level to promote empowerment and to engage in advocacy (Morales, 1981).

Empowerment practice is seen as a powerful approach for newcomer settlement (Vayle, 1992; Hirayama and Cetingok, 1988). Hirayama and Cetingok (1988) postulate three roles for social workers serving newcomer clients: cultural translators, cultural mediators and role models.

The stress reduction model (Hirayama et al., 1993) identifies three types of major stressors for newcomers: family pressures, occupational concerns and cultural barriers; and explores a stress reduction model for a program for South-east Asian newcomers. This program assisted newcomers in dealing with stressors by increasing their coping skills and self-esteem and by strengthening the newcomers' support networks.

A number of theory-based models based on stages of immigrant adjustment are found in the literature. Cox (1985) proposed a model based on his conceptualization of the migration process as consisting of four stages: pre-movement, transition, resettlement and integration. Similarly, the stages of migration framework (Drachman, 1992) maintained that there are three stages in migration: pre-migration and departure, transit and resettlement. Both of these models describe critical variables that affect newcomer adjustment at each of the stages. The acculturative framework advanced by Herberg portrayed acculturation as a continuum that can take several generations (Herberg, 1988). She maintained that

during the early stages of settlement, immigrants will 'overcompensate' and function at extremely high levels and later they will 'decompensate' as part of the process of cultural shock. Racism, poor mental health, language problems and unrealized expectations can exacerbate this process. The process of newcomer integration can be viewed as a continuum moving from acclimatization to adaptation and finally to integration (George and Fuller-Thompson, 1998).

During the initial stage of settlement, major needs of newcomers include: employment, shelter, host-country language acquisition and basic orientation. In the later stages of adaptation and integration, newcomers become more concerned with career advancement, ethno-cultural and/or racial identity and full political and social participation in their new society. This continuum shows the need for appropriate settlement services that meet social, economic, cultural and political needs according to the stage of the newcomers.

Practice-based models of settlement service delivery often contrast two types of structures: ethnic or ethno-specific agency service delivery and mainstream agency service delivery (Jenkins, 1980; Iglehart and Becerra, 1996; Pinto and Sawicki, 1997). Ethno-specific or ethnic agencies are often portrayed as models for the provision of culturally appropriate services for newcomers, due to their emphasis on self-help and empowerment, and their in-depth knowledge of the newcomers' cultures.

Several authors have explored bridging models or collaborative approaches (Lampugnani, 1997; Schnur et al., 1995; Galway, 1991; Matsuoka and Sorenson, 1991; McNicoll and Christensen, 1996; Nann and Goldberg, 1994; Law and Hasenfield, 1989; Cox, 1983; Blum, 1988; Ivry, 1992). There are different conceptualizations of bridging models: ethno-specific agencies can be seen as bridges between newcomers and the institutional structures of the host country (Lampugnani, 1997); or the settlement worker him/herself can be viewed as a mediator between services and newcomers (Galway, 1991; Schnur et al., 1995).

In meeting the settlement needs of immigrants from what is commonly referred to by outsiders as a cultural community, one should be most careful not to gloss over the differences between ethno-racial groups from the same source country. Newcomers may understandably be reticent in accepting settlement services from ethno-specific agencies that are staffed by people from an ethnic group which has had a long-standing conflict with their own (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 1991).

Collaboration between ethno-specific agencies and mainstream agencies or institutions is also possible and even desirable when such partnerships are equitable. Mainstream agencies can gain the experience and specific expertise of ethno-specific agency workers and ethno-specific agencies gain the resources of larger organizations (Nann and Goldberg, 1994).

In reviewing the literature it becomes evident that settlement service models have generally focused on theoretical concerns or on the interests of the service providers. Most of the models did not incorporate consultations with newcomers. The model described in the following section was formulated inductively with input from both newcomers and service providers.

### **Consultation on the needs of African newcomers**

#### *Study background*

They come from 48 source countries in Africa, which have extremely diverse ethnic populations. Most African newcomers, except for those from Ethiopia and Somalia, are familiar with one of Canada's two official languages. African newcomers constitute about 5 percent of the landed arrivals in the city of Toronto and more than half of the African newcomers to the province of Ontario settle in Toronto. For example, in 1997, 6979 African newcomers arrived in Ontario, out of whom 3943 (56.5 percent) arrived in Toronto. Approximately 83 percent of the newcomers arrived from only nine of the 48 countries. These countries were: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Somalia, Sudan, Morocco and Kenya (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).

In the absence of stable community organizations serving the community, OASIS has tried a number of arrangements to provide funding for settlement services for African newcomers. However, these attempts have not resulted in satisfactory service delivery to this diverse group of newcomers (Opoku-Dapaah, 1993). OASIS therefore funded a study to recommend effective and affordable model(s) of settlement service delivery for African newcomers in Toronto. The study was to arrive at the model(s) through extensive consultations with African newcomers to Toronto and with agencies engaged in both advocacy and direct service for the community.

## Methodology

The consultations consisted of three stages of data collection: pre-focus group interviews with prospective participants; one round of 18 focus groups with African newcomers, service providers and funders of settlement services; and a second round of three focus groups, one with African newcomers and two with service providers. African newcomers recruited for the study were either landed immigrants or sponsored refugees, and had arrived in Canada after 1995. The consultations, which were held from September 1998 to February 1999, were also sensitive to the language needs of African newcomers.

The distribution of the 18 focus groups was as follows: African newcomers (eight focus groups); non-profit, ethno-specific service providers for African newcomers (one group in English); non-profit, non-ethno-specific and ethno-specific service providers for African newcomers (one group in French); non-profit, non-ethno-specific service providers serving African newcomers (one group in English); African ethno-cultural organizations (one group in English); race relations and umbrella groups (one group in English); religious organizations (one group in English); employment and education agencies (one group in English); health and housing agencies and women's shelters serving African newcomers (two groups in English); and funders of settlement services (one group in English). Due to the cultural and linguistic complexity of Africa, we divided the source countries into four major groupings for the focus groups: Arab Africa (North Africa), English Africa (East, West and South Africa), French Africa (Central Africa), and the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia).

Seventy-six African newcomers and 76 service providers completed pre-focus group interviews. Sixty-five African newcomers and 75 service providers attended the first round of focus groups. Two representatives, each from the first round of focus groups, attended the second round of focus groups. Focus groups for French Africans and French service providers were conducted in French. Two focus groups were conducted for the Horn of Africa: one for newcomers from Ethiopia and the other for newcomers from Somalia. Cultural interpreters were provided for both of these focus groups. The second round of focus groups was held to build consensus on the themes identified by the first round of focus groups.



Throughout the consultations, newcomer groups were held separately from service provider groups in order to ensure the free flow of ideas. Participants were recruited by research assistants, who themselves were newcomers from Africa. Recruitment followed a snowball technique. Transportation costs were covered for all participants; newcomers also received honoraria. The principal investigator and a paid research associate from the African community facilitated all focus groups. Issues explored in the pre-focus group interviews and the focus groups were mainly three: needs of newcomers from Africa; the existing service delivery model and gaps; and proposals for a new model of service delivery model. Pre-focus group interviews and transcribed focus group data were analysed according to content analysis procedures by the principal investigator and the research team.

### *Results*

In the three stages of consultations held, African newcomers identified the following settlement needs: affordable housing, employment, language training, information on available services, orientation to Canadian life, family counselling and community connections. These needs were also mentioned by the service providers. Both the newcomers and the service providers identified major barriers to settlement and adaptation. The major barriers were linguistic and cultural differences, especially for those from the Horn of Africa, who had limited or no knowledge of Canada's official languages. Lack of familiarity with the norms and values of Judeo-Christian, Anglo-Saxon and Western European social, economic and political systems was challenging for many of the newcomers. Ontario's official bilingual policies were misleading for the Francophone newcomers because of the limited amount of Francophone services in Ontario. Systemic and direct discrimination was also prevalent in housing and employment. In the absence of a fair and open process of assessment of foreign credentials, most professionally trained newcomers endured tremendous frustration in trying to obtain recognition of their educational and work experience.

In the first round of focus groups, the service providers suggested five models and the newcomers suggested one model of service delivery. During the second round, the service providers consolidated their previous models into one model and the newcomers made slight modifications to their earlier model.

The model suggested by the service providers has three components: the formation of an African umbrella organization or an

African centre; support for African ethno-specific agencies; and increased cultural sensitivity of mainstream agencies to African newcomers. The African centre would provide a centralized initial assessment and intake of African newcomers. Culturally and linguistically sensitive counsellors would also provide referrals and follow-up. Advocacy and research would be part of the mandate of the centre. African ethno-specific organizations would serve those with language difficulties; and mainstream agencies would provide services to all those who need specialized services that are not provided in ethno-specific agencies or to those newcomers who do not wish to access services at ethno-specific agencies.

Most of the newcomers who attended the focus groups were either unaware of existing settlement and social services, or were dissatisfied with the services they had received. The newcomer focus groups discussed at length their needs and frustrations and insisted on a systemic response to those needs. They proposed two levels of service delivery. The first one included pre-immigration preparation and a continuum of services in Canada for all newcomers. The second level consisted of specialized services to assist newcomers with specific needs, such as access to professions and trades, family stress, mental health issues and experiences of discrimination.

The research team then faced the task of recommending a final model. The models of settlement service delivery suggested by the final round of focus groups of newcomers and service providers were very different from each other. The service providers suggested a number of models that would enhance their current structures and services, while the newcomers wanted a model that responded to their settlement needs. These different orientations were very evident in the proposed models. In terms of feasibility and cost effectiveness, the model suggested by service providers would be difficult to implement in that it required the creation of an umbrella body which would also provide direct services. The final model had to address the issue of competition for scarce resources by service providers, but also manage to build partnership and collaboration between both mainstream and ethno-specific agencies.

### **The recommended model**

While developing a recommendation for a model for service delivery for African newcomers, the researchers were aware of the fact that the needs of newcomers to Canada are fairly consistent regardless of their source country. Three recent studies of different newcomer

groups to Canada (George and Michalski, 1996; Michalski, 1997; Tsang and George, 1998) have all found that the basic settlement needs of newcomers are: general orientation to Canadian life, establishing community connections, housing, employment, language training and information on available services. Assigning priority to any of these needs depends on individual circumstances, pre-migratory experiences and available community resources. All newcomer needs must be addressed with the cultural and linguistic sensitivity that is required to make newcomers feel welcome, especially if they are not familiar with the language(s) of the host country.

Currently, funding for settlement services in Canada is based on the number of landed arrivals from source countries, and is increased if the arrivals have very little or no knowledge of official languages. Country of origin and language then become the criteria for the allocation of resources. This creates immense competition between agencies and community groups for funding.

The service delivery model that we propose is based on the following features.

*Needs-based* In light of the fact that there is an increasing number of newcomers selected on the basis of their educational and occupational credentials, we propose that the model combine two features: newcomer needs and number of arrivals. Need is a fundamental criterion in this model, which will be mediated by linguistic and cultural considerations. The number of newcomers from a source country will continue to play a large role in the allocation of funding resources in this model.

*Specialization-based* In the current model of settlement service delivery, one counsellor generally provides all the settlement services such as referral, information/orientation, interpretation/translation, counselling and employment-related services. This state of affairs does not take into account the specific needs of different groups of newcomers. For example, newcomers from wartorn countries and foreign-trained professionals need specialized settlement services. Services should be based on such special needs, mediated by linguistic and cultural sensitivity. Grouping specialized services together at a given centre would make such services accessible to newcomers and greatly improve the system of referrals.

*Case management-based* Through our consultations it was clear that newcomers wanted a system in which follow-ups are carried

out after their initial entry into the system. Using such a system would allow monitoring of the quality of the service and of the progress of newcomer adaptation.

The proposed model of settlement service emphasizes adequate pre-migration preparation and orientation for prospective immigrants to Canada. It also recommends extensive outreach to newcomers to inform them of available services. The proposed model of service to newcomers consists of three levels.

*Level 1: reception and basic-level services*

Reception level services include information, orientation and referral services. Organizations that offer these services should be common meeting places and drop-in centres for newcomers. These centres should hold regular information and orientation sessions and provide current and customized information depending on the newcomers' special needs. Programs such as a mentoring or a buddy system in which newcomers are matched with earlier immigrants of similar professional background can also be created. Linguistic and cultural sensitivity is of extreme importance at this level. Basic-level services consist of services such as intake, assessment and general settlement assistance, such as housing assistance, language training, employment assistance (résumé writing and job search skills), translation, obtaining essential documents, mentoring, networking, peer counselling, educational upgrading and information on available services in Canada. Housing requires special attention, especially with regard to the finding of affordable housing and teaching newcomers how to negotiate with landlords in their new setting.

This level of service should also have a referral function for those newcomers who wish to become more connected with other newcomers and with mainstream society.

*Level 2: services for labour market entry*

The services at this level are referral services to address the special needs of highly educated and foreign-trained professionals. The services should consist of assistance with credential evaluation, accreditation, obtaining Canadian work experience, labour market-related language training, education upgrading and licensing. Specialized training is essential for settlement workers at this level of services. Settlement workers must know all the relevant details about the process of credential recognition by professional and

trade regulatory bodies and must continually update their knowledge to stay abreast of changes in licensing requirements.

### *Level 3: specialized settlement services*

This level involves referrals to culturally sensitive services for individual and family counselling to respond to major stressor experiences of newcomers, such as family pressures, employment-related concerns, cultural barriers and experiences of discrimination. The goal of this level of services is to improve the coping strategies of newcomers, many of whom feel the initial experience of immigration is a professional and social setback. Clear referral guidelines must be set for the provision of these services, since many of the needed services will be more in-depth or specialized than can be provided by settlement workers.

## **Conclusion**

The model proposed in this article addresses the issues of all immigration classes in that the three levels of services respond to their different needs. The issues of cultural and linguistic sensitivity are given priority in the first level of service, which is concerned with newcomers' basic needs and initial settlement experience. In the second level of service, specialized training of settlement workers is essential in that they need to learn the specific details of credential assessment and newcomer job placements. The third level of service is particularly important for those newcomers who come from traditions that are significantly different from mainstream Canadians and who may experience significantly more disorientation during the settlement process.

A benefit of this model is that it does not encourage the perception that one settlement worker can deal with all of the varied needs of all newcomers. It advocates very specific training for settlement workers, especially for those dealing with the recognition of the credentials of foreign-trained professionals and trades people.

This model brings newcomers' needs to the forefront of the planning of settlement service delivery, where they belong. There is a place for considerations of the needs, particularly the resource needs, of service providers, but it is essential to make newcomers' settlement needs the fundamental criterion on which settlement service delivery is based.

The model proposed here is feasible because it does not require new resources and it could operate within the parameters of existing programs. The incorporation of this model would improve settlement service delivery for newcomers to Canada and provides a starting point for a lively discussion of the continuing development of excellent settlement service delivery models.

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