

London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership

Education Sub-council

Monday, March 1, 2010 (3:30-5:30)

Location: G.A Wheable, Room A220

Present: Muriel Abbott, Raja Al-Abed, Jean-Pierre Cantin, Sheila Carson, Gerardo Castro, Ahad Emami, Kim Godin, Becky Howse, Helen Patterson, Mureed Shahid, Denise Taylor-Edwards, Dr. Shelly Taylor, Susanne Quan, Ramiro Castro, Jo-elle Rinker, Mo Jeng, Nancy Pollard, Dr. Farahnza Faez and Huda Hussein.

Regrets: Sonia Muhimpundu, Cynthia Konnerth and Kate Kennedy.

Summary:

Welcome & Introductions:

Jean-Pierre thanked the group for selecting him to be their voice at the Central Council. Jean-Pierre also highlighted the importance of this sub-council and the tasks expected of this group. He then requested the new members to introduce themselves.

Minutes were reviewed and approved after including Ramiro's name to the list of attendees.

Contact List:

Members were given copies of the contact list as requested.

Review of Gaps and Priority Setting Template:

Members were requested to review the gaps and check if anything they thought is important was missing.

Theme # 1: Internationally trained professional:

This theme reflects a number of gaps:

The discrepancy between information presented outside Canada and the reality the immigrants face when they land. This issue is beyond the scope of this sub-council and it was noted that any recommendations that the sub-council will make needs to involve the federal government. Another related issue was around the validity of the information on immigration, how current it is? How long does it hold? The need for the government to update its information constantly is critical. Given the advocacy role that the sub-council has, the group will advocate on issues that the community sees important. It was also commented that any proposal or recommendation that the sub-council makes need to be realistic and doable to enhance services for integration.

In terms of the gap of the process it takes for an individual to find a job, it was noted that this may belong to the Employment Sub-council therefore the suggestion was to defer our recommendation on this and link it to the Employment Sub-council (Chair to communicate with Employment Sub-council)

Eligibility issue: A variety of programs funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada serve permanent residents only and this leaves out the refugee claimants. The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration funds some programs such as the English as a Second language program (ESL) only and there are many programs pertaining to higher education, job specific programs and many others that the refugee claimants are not eligible for. Many times, these claimants live in Canada for years before their cases have been reviewed and determined. What can be done to fill this gap? Recommendation may consider requesting more funds from the Province or a combined funding from both the federal and the province. The group also discussed that numbers needed to support any recommendation on any gap. It was pointed that according to a recent study by Investing in Children, London has the highest number of refugees per capita than any other city in Ontario.

Action: Mureed Shahid and Sheila Carson will look into stats of the refugee population in London. Sheila will also consult with Mo Jeng and will also share with the group the results of the recent survey of MCI based on 400 surveys.

Theme #2: Supports to Access of Education

ESL Wait List:

There is lack of integrated coordination system. Each school has its own list. This creates a discrepancy in the number of students in each class in the city of London. Where some classes have a wait list others have shortage in the number of students. Most clients prefer neighborhood based schools be it Language Instructions for New Canadians or English as a Second Language. There are a number of challenges facing clients such as transportation, child minding and affordable housing among others. The need is to take into consideration all these factors when planning for ESL or LINC programs. It was noted that incentives did not work in the past therefore the mentioned issues need to be considered when planning these classes.

Eligibility for child minding programs:

Only LINC students are eligible for free child minding. These are limited spots with many applicants requiring it. There is a huge discrepancy between the available spots and the number of applicants.

Action: Collect statistics for ESL and or immigrants in general where services are required. The LINC mapping may be a helpful resource. A strategy for this gap can be two folded: analyze current system to put in place a coordination system and recommend hubs of services that focus on the population in the neighborhood. Understanding the situation and preference of clients is critical after coordination process especially when most clients are under the poverty line. LINC website is in the works may be a useful tool that may have a link in the Immigration Portal.

UPCOMING STRATEGY: Sheila shared that adult language training services funded by the provincial and federal governments are moving towards a coordinated system. One aspect is a coordinated language assessment system. There will be one provider conducting the assessments and making referrals to ALL providers. So a learner will go to an Assessment Centre and then be given all the options available to him - based on language level, immigration status eligibility and needs. The learner will make the decision which program to access. (Currently, learners wanting LINC services go to CCLC. ESL learners go to Wheable or St Pat's for an assessment and referral.)

This new system is to begin rolling out in January 2011. London MAY be selected to do a pilot. Eventually we will have this system.

Suggestion: There was a suggestion that immigrants need to be followed by volunteers to ensure that their basic needs in terms of education, training are on track and help with information if needed. Such a strategy will help in the integration process as well as in the prevention of the stress and distress of the immigrants.

Relationship between parents and schools

Lack of communication between school and parents isolates and leaves feelings of disempowerment among immigrant parents. Very often parents do not feel welcomed in the school; the 'bureaucracy' of schools is intimidating whether it is the phone system or trying to approach the school in person. There often exists a clash between expectations that the parents have on the school system and the reality of the classrooms. Families are given bulk of information at one time.

Action Strategy: Immigrants need to be given Information when they needed it not in bulk.

Theme #3 Supports for Teachers:

Lack of specialized training for elementary and secondary teachers to meet the needs of the newcomers:

Was there lack of training or willingness to access available training? Programs and workshops are available for teachers but they are not mandatory. Teachers choose not to take it. It was noted that in the U.S such trainings are mandatory for teachers in many states. The courses that are available at UWO are elective not obligatory.

Action Suggested: work with union and the two boards to mandate specialized training for teachers of both elementary and secondary schools. Many immigrants' students will continue to come to London and if teachers are not trained to cope with such diversity, London and Middlesex will face more challenges.

Mentoring Students:

Students come from different cultural backgrounds and educational capacities. The need is to understand these issues by putting more supports. The current project Settlement Workers in School

(SWIS), funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, may help to ease this problem. Service providers in the school system will coordinate and work together with the Settlement Workers in schools.

Curriculum:

It was discussed that the current curriculum needs to be modified as it is not rich enough in diversity issue. At the high school curriculum, students have to complete one credit in Canadian Geography and one credit in Canadian History to graduate.

Action suggested: Since Canada has become a country of immigrants; Ontario needs to review its curriculum in geography and history. Canada is now a multicultural society but with no knowledge on the neighbors and this needs to be changed.

Another suggested action: Should we initiate a project educating teachers by giving information to create awareness in London and Middlesex about the city's popular cultures? Create modules on how to work with learners from the ESL population and get four to five teachers who are interested and build capacity percolating up and other teachers would buy in after building small communities in the school. Funding is required.

Next Meeting:

Monday March 22, 3:30-5:30 at room A220 GA Wheable