

# Recent Immigrants and Employment



Social Planning Council  
of Cambridge and North Dumfries



YMCA YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services

June 2004

## “Starting from Zero in Cambridge and North Dumfries”

### A little history...

Cambridge has long been a destination for immigrants, with almost 21% of the population being born outside of Canada.<sup>1</sup> In November of 2003 the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries produced a findings paper on multiculturalism within the communities of Cambridge and North Dumfries. This paper identified several barriers immigrants face when moving to the area, as well as outlining the ethno-cultural demographics of the communities. This information was gathered from interviews with the staff of the Immigrant Services Department of the YMCA of Cambridge and data from the 2001 Census. Based on the information provided by YMCA Immigrant Services, employment was listed as one of the top three needs and challenges experienced by immigrants in their settlement efforts. Both the Social Planning Council and YMCA Immigrant Services had a desire to further explore the issue, and as a result, partnered to host an employer forum focusing on the theme of employment and recent immigrants.

### The Employer Forum

The employer forum was held May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services. The focus of the forum was for employers to become aware of the barriers immigrants face while trying to find employment and for immigrants to become aware of employer expectations while looking for work in Canada. Three recent immigrants and one employer spoke to an audience of over 50 people. Those in attendance represented both the recent immigrant population and the business community. Forum participants discussed employment needs, strengths and potential areas for change in an effort to decrease barriers to immigrants in labour market participation.

The objectives of the forum were to:

- Share the experiences of recent immigrants,
- Share the experiences of local employers in hiring recent immigrants,
- Acknowledge and build on the existing employment successes,
- Identify needs of employers in hiring recent immigrants,
- Identify barriers faced by immigrants in finding employment.

### **BACKGROUNDER :**

Spotlight on Immigration and Employment in Cambridge and North Dumfries

#### Recent Immigrants

- 1 820 individuals are recent immigrants (arriving within the last five years)
  - 19% from India
  - 8% from Pakistan
  - 6% from the United Kingdom
  - 5% from the United States
  - 5% from China
  - 4% from Philippines
  - 4% from Mexico
  - with other countries having less than 4%<sup>2</sup>

The Waterloo Region has the fifth highest per capita immigrant population of all urban areas in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

44% of recent immigrants destined to Waterloo Region in 2002 applied as skilled workers or other economic immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

In the future, 90% of Canada's population growth and 100% of labour market growth will come from immigration.<sup>5</sup>

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## Voices of Recent Immigrants

The forum provided an opportunity for recent immigrants to voice their experiences to the employers present. Recent immigrant panel participants expressed their thoughts and concerns regarding looking for work in Canada:

“You start from zero in Canada – put away your experiences”

Before coming to Canada immigrants heard that “Canada is a peaceful country, has lots of opportunities, and a good future for children”

But.... “After coming to Canada I learned that life here is hard”

“The Canadian system is not ready for skilled immigrants”.

“The unemployment rate of recent immigrants is not right, immigrants should have a chance to work in their profession to benefit Canada”

“It took one year (of volunteering and working) to get to a point where I feel comfortable”

It is clear from the stories of recent immigrants and national and local statistics that finding employment is a great challenge for many recent immigrants. This community forum helped facilitate dialogue between employers and recent immigrants around the issues and barriers they face in addressing their employment needs. The challenge faced by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and the YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services is: As a community what are some of the things we can do to

### BACKGROUND:

#### Citizen and Immigration Canada

“Coming to Canada as an immigrant is an exciting opportunity, but also a great challenge.”

“Canada values the skills and experiences that foreign professionals and workers bring with them.”<sup>6</sup>

“Skilled workers have education, work experience, knowledge of English and/or French and other abilities that will help them to establish themselves successfully as permanent residents in Canada.”<sup>7</sup>

reduce the challenges faced by recent immigrants and who is responsible in addressing these barriers and challenges?

## Forum Themes

Forum participants worked in several small discussion groups to address questions focused on the realities of recent immigrants and employers. From this discussion several themes emerged.

### Theme – Employment Needs and Challenges of Recent Immigrants

Based on prior experience and forum content, participants were asked to identify the needs and challenges of recent immigrants. The predominant needs and challenges are listed below.

#### The Needs and Challenges of Recent Immigrants

- More networking opportunities
- Qualifications and experience are not transferable or recognized
- Employers do not hire from the recent immigrant population
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences

#### What does this mean?

Identifying needs and challenges helps us understand the issues affecting immigrants in our community and begins the process of working towards change. Avenues for networking opportunities need to be further developed, such as gatherings/discussions between the recent immigrant population and employers. This may begin to give employers exposure to the recent immigrant community and the skills they bring with them. An article “Coming to Canada” noted that “companies don’t know overseas companies. They want candidates who have perfect English, and who understand the Canadian work environment”<sup>8</sup>. This makes it difficult for immigrants to find work in local companies and to display their skills. In addition, recognition of the cultural differences among both employers and recent immigrants offers the opportunity for all people to examine their cultural practices. For employers, sessions on the impact of culture and the benefits of hiring immigrants may be

an excellent starting place to reduce some of the challenges that recent immigrants face. A recently conducted survey by the Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board indicated that employers would like more information on the qualifications of recent immigrants, as well as finding a way to allow these qualifications and skills to be recognised and applied.<sup>9</sup>

#### **BACKGROUNDER:**

“Many immigrants have skills and qualifications that are desperately needed in the local labour market (medical professional and technical skills, for example), but current barriers prevent or prolong domestic recognition of these qualifications.”

The urgent need to find employment and earn income often limits their ability to overcome other barriers like recognition of qualifications and the need to improve language and literacy skills.<sup>10</sup>

## **Theme – Employment Successes**

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services were also interested to know about employment successes with the hope that there are areas of strength that as a community we can build on. Based on the experience of the participants at the forum they were asked to identify areas of employment success. The participants’ responses are grouped into two categories- immigrant efforts, which lead to successful employment and employer efforts, which lead to the successful hiring of recent immigrants.

Participants identified several areas in which lead to and/or improved the likelihood of immigrants successfully gaining employment:

- Willing to start at the bottom
- Volunteering to get Canadian experience
- Hard work
- Motivated
- Committed
- Willingness to learn by trying things and taking initiative

### **What does this mean?**

Based on the responses from the Forum participants several areas were outlined in which recent immigrants can focus to successfully gain employment. Forum participants also indicated that when employers are aware that recent immigrants are motivated, it may lead to more hiring of immigrants. These results may also indicate that more human resource strategies need to be developed and more benefits need to be identified for employers. As more strategies are developed it may assist employers in hiring more recent immigrants.

#### **BACKGROUNDER:**

“Skilled immigrants are an extremely important component of the local labour force, and it is evident from survey response that local businesses recognize this. However, the results also indicate that there continue to be significant obstacles to hiring skilled immigrants. These findings echo other recent research and commentary that suggests that immigrant skills are an important local labour force resource, and that in general, this resource is not utilized effectively to improve economic activity and business performance locally.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Needs Identified**

The following section addresses suggestions from both employers and recent immigrants:

### **To promote the hiring of recent immigrants Employers need:**

- More centralized information on recent immigrants
- More patience and cultural sensitivity techniques
- To be willing to interview immigrants to hear about their experience
- To be open to allowing people to learn skills on the job (i.e. English)
- A better understanding of immigrants education and culture
- To recognize that transportation is a barrier

- To be aware of the YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services
- To translate Health and Safety rules into other languages

### To gain employment Recent Immigrants need:

- Community connections and networking opportunities
- Confidence
- Experience and Education
- Patience and positive attitude
- A resume explaining relative skills and experience
- Practice communicating effectively
- The ability to take criticism
- Opportunities to ask questions if they don't understand
- Willingness to give more, give more than 100%
- To make compromises

#### **BACKGROUNDER:**

A recent survey done by the Waterloo Wellington Training & Adjustment Board of 191 businesses across the Regional Municipality of Waterloo and the County of Wellington asked employers what would make it easier to hire immigrants. Almost half of the respondents said an increased English language proficiency, just over 17% indicated they needed more access to immigrant pool, 15.7% said they needed a positive experience and 10% felt they needed to have a better understanding of the educational equivalencies.<sup>12</sup>

#### **What does this mean?**

Being aware of the benefits involved in hiring immigrants is one way to bridge the gap between employers and immigrants. Social indicators demonstrate that Cambridge and North Dumfries, similar to the rest of the Waterloo Region and Canada, will experience an increase in immigrants. "In the future, 90% of Canada's population growth and 100% of labour market growth will come from immigration."<sup>13</sup> This is an opportunity for our community to both welcome and benefit from the entry of immigrants into the workplace. Immigrants have long been a part of the Canadian population. Over time the countries of origin of these immigrants have changed, but the contributions which immigrants can and will make to this community and the country are substantial.

### **What's next?**

Presently recent immigrants are facing several barriers and challenges, which are limiting their ability to contribute and become a part of the community. As a result of the Forum, a group of participants, both recent immigrants and employers, have come together to start a dialogue between the two groups with the goal of developing recommendations, which will reflect the needs identified at the Forum. It is the responsibility of all members of the community to create and work together toward strategies that will both improve the lives of recent immigrants and help to grow and develop our community.

### **Recommendations**

From the information contained in this report, the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and the YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services make the following recommendations:

- That copies of this paper be forwarded to appropriate governing, policy and funding bodies including all forum attendees, Human Resources Skills Development Canada, The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, City of Cambridge, Township of North Dumfries, The Chamber of Commerce, Waterloo Wellington training and Adjustment Board, and Provincial Professional Associations for use in their policy planning, funding and programming decisions.
- That copies of this paper be forwarded to local ethnic clubs and associations, neighbourhood associations and other agencies delivering services to immigrant populations in the Cambridge and North Dumfries communities for use in planning and programming decisions.
- The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and the YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services will facilitate an advisory resource group to promote the labour market participation of newcomers/immigrants within the community.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> 2001 Census, Statistics Canada (Processed by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries).

<sup>2</sup> Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, 2003. *Multiculturalism in Cambridge and North Dumfries*. Social Issues Series, Issue Paper No. 5, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 2001 Census, Statistics Canada (Processed by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries).

<sup>4</sup> Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2004. *A Profile of Immigrants in Waterloo Region*.

<sup>5</sup> Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board, 2004. *Community Profile: Labour Market*.

<sup>6</sup> Citizen and Immigration Canada. *Immigrating to Canada*. On line at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Citizen and Immigration Canada. *Immigrating to Canada*. On line at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> Cairncross, Rosalind. (2004). *Coming to Canada*.

On-line at: [www.canadianconsultingengineer.com](http://www.canadianconsultingengineer.com)

<sup>9</sup> Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board, 2004. *Community Profile: Labour Market*.

<sup>10</sup> Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board, 2004. *Community Profile: Labour Market*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board, 2004. *Community Profile: Labour Market*.

<sup>12</sup> Waterloo-Wellington Training and Adjustment Board, 2004. *Business Outlook 2004 – Skills and Training Summary*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2004. *A Profile of Immigrants in Waterloo Region*.

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