

Intercultural Society of the Central Okanagan

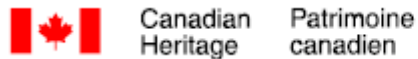
The Changing Face of Kelowna: Are We Ready?

Summary Report

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A. Background

Funded by Canadian Heritage and supported by the Intercultural Society of the Central Okanagan, Kelowna Community Resources, UBCO, Economic Development Commission and several other partners, the goal of the project was to assess the level of cultural awareness, and appreciation of cultural diversity at the community, business, education and individual level within the City of Kelowna. The methodology included a literature review, a best practices report, various focus groups, structured interviews with employers, educators, service providers and visible minority groups or individuals, and a final public forum.

The project advisory committee, comprising representative from ISCO, KCR (Kelowna Community Resources), UBCO, Okanagan College, the ELSA program (English Language Services for Adults), and the Economic Development Commission, were actively involved in providing input into the project through four meetings.

Below are a summary of the research highlights, the recurring themes from the interviews and focus groups, a summary of the best practices report's findings and recommendations, a description of the public forum and some final conclusions.

RESEARCH

B. Research Highlights

Taken from the full research report available on the ISCO website www.interculturalkelowna.com

- m Kelowna stands out within BC and Canada with a distinctive demographic profile: older, Caucasian, English speaking and Canadian.

- m Kelowna's ethnic composition has been drawn predominantly from European heritage. Statistics show that it has the lowest percentage of visible minorities in Canada.

- m Kelowna's level of visible minority diversity has increased from 3.9% in 2001 to 6.2% in 2006.

- m Kelowna is a rapidly growing city, but most of its growth comes from moves within Canada; only 7% is international immigration.

- m Kelowna's immigrant ethnic composition is changing. While 65% of all immigrants are from Europe, there is now a growing stream of visible minority residents (6.2% of Kelowna's population in 2006).

- m Since 2003, approximately equal numbers of immigrants (around 30 – 40%) come from Europe and Asia/Pacific.

- m Local businesses, institutions of higher learning and the agricultural sector are key drivers of international immigration.

- m Instances of racism and discrimination are found in many places in Kelowna. This is recognized as an ongoing challenge, and individuals and agencies are working to educate the public about respect and interaction with diverse others.

- m Local media promote the value of immigration to helping Kelowna grow economically. However, they do not fully address the complexities of racism in this region.

C. Summary of Media Coverage

Since 2004, the media has done a reasonably good job of providing positive coverage of the stories of immigrants and of the cultural and religious diversity events in the community. A number of articles normalize the diversity in Kelowna and claim the successes of its residents for anti-racist work. At the same time, some of the coverage of more challenging instances of ethnic relations is complex: it assumes that Kelowna is already a tolerant and accepting community; while reflecting a lack of understanding of the complexity of race relations; and simultaneously offering pieces of information to appease racist fears. Good coverage is provided to educate about the value and benefits of immigration and diversity. More could be done to educate about the complexities of power relations and ethnicity; about the intersection of varied

social forces (economics, residency, language, gender, employment) with racism and power; and to challenge Kelowna to want to think of itself as diverse, and to want to tackle the challenge of moving forwards towards a more welcoming and inclusive community.

The full media table is available on the ISCO website.

INTERVIEWS

Fourteen individuals (8 visible minorities, 3 “dissenters”, 2 church leaders, 2 businessmen, 2 Civic employees, 2 active in multiculturalism and 2 media representatives) were interviewed anonymously. They all had a chance to respond to emailed summaries of their interviews.

D. Recurring Themes from Interviews

Perceived Barriers

- Curiosity, ignorance about different customs, style of dress, homophobia,
- Racism does exist or simmers beneath the surface
- Poor customer service, especially when customer has an accent
- Some workers exploited – not told about their rights
- Access to ESL, training of ESL teachers
- Credential evaluation – costly, time consuming
- Access to information not always easy and little information in other languages
- Immigrants must be like us – must fit in (dissenters)

Recommendation Highlights

- Diversity training, including how to speak to limited English speakers
- Better access to ESL, better and more ESL, free ESL
- Better access to information
- Centralized services (central meeting place/information centre) for newcomers with cultural liaison workers
- Continued cultural events and programs
- Use of and access to trained Interpreters plus translated materials and materials in plain language
- Access to toll-free multilingual information line or website specific to Kelowna and specific to information needed by new immigrants.

FOCUS GROUPS

Five focus groups were held with service providers, representatives from the business community, community leaders, educators and students. Each group comprised approximately 10 – 20 participants.

E. Recurring Themes from Focus Groups

Problems

- Lack of information about or poor access to services, immigration rules, foreign credentials, or information not available in other languages, not available in plain language, not well marketed.
- Kelowna is very ethnocentric and inexperienced in cross-cultural awareness, very little diversity in some workplaces and little attempt to attract workers from other cultures, many frontline workers

unable to communicate with limited English speakers, many inappropriate jokes and racist jokes are heard in some workplaces, little tolerance for differences, HR people only trained in interviewing techniques applicable to WASP workers, some exploitation of entry level workers, little tolerance for hearing other language spoken at work

- Services fragmented, lack of knowledge about existing services
- Language Services – Given the large geographic area and yet the small number of students creating a demand for ESL, it has been challenging for the school district to provide these services. Overall in Kelowna, there are few or no evening classes, little awareness of the value of using trained interpreters, no TESL training for K-12 teachers, poor signage in the city, little plain language or translated information available.
- Social Support - Newcomers complain of lack of knowledge on how and where to meet friends of their own culture or Canadian culture and lack of opportunity to practice their English, spouses of newly recruited employees (as well as the employees themselves) feel isolated. Many leave after a short time due to lack of social opportunities, or lack of access to ethnic foods, restaurants, stores that help them feel welcome.

Recommended Solutions:

Information

- Centralization (one-stop shopping) through a Cultural Referral Centre
- Prepare information sheets (multilingual if possible) on a variety of topics: one-pager with main services for immigrants or newcomers, information sheet about the process of credential evaluation for various occupations/professions, myths and facts about immigration. Have this information available online and at embassies overseas to avoid misinformation
- Create better awareness of services through marketing
- Sharing of resources such translated documents among employers, agencies, etc.

Diversity

- Anti-racism Steering Committee or Task Force to coordinate initiatives city-wide
- More and better diversity training, including how to communicate with limited English speakers and in culturally sensitive interview techniques
- Recruitment and retention techniques and social programs that avoid rapid turnover of newcomers unable to adjust
- More acceptance or employment equity standards
- More opportunities to share cultures through cultural events
- Better use of existing programs such as the host and buddy programs, language partners, workplace mentors.
- More opportunities to gain Canadian experience through job shadowing, mentorship programs, volunteering etc.
- Training for and use cultural liaison volunteers and interpreters/translators in major language or cultural groups

Services

- Strategic partnerships among agencies, governments, ESL providers, businesses

Language support

- Coordination among ESL providers to fill the gaps
- Training of interpreters and on the value of using trained interpreters and on the appropriate use of interpreters
- TESL program for K-12 as well as volunteer ESL teachers
- Better support for ESL at K-12 level

Social support

- A Cultural Centre or central meeting place where many cultures (including Canadians) can mix. Centre could include language classes, free daycare onsite, free transportation, career centre, resource centre, library of used foreign language books, ethnic food centres etc.
- Neighbourhood associations or cultural groups and churches getting involved
- Block parties
- Social programs in workplaces for employees and their spouses

BEST PRACTICES

Below are extracts from the Best Practices report written by the researcher. The full report can be viewed online at www.interculturalkelowna.com

F. Best Practices for Creating a Welcoming Community Highlights

Rather than emphasizing solely the responsibilities of immigrants, the focus on “welcoming communities” brings in the *reciprocal responsibilities* of the receiving communities to facilitate the transition to life in Canada.

Many services and supports are needed for a community to be welcoming. These range from practical services such as language training and help finding housing; through employment services which facilitate recognition of credentials, links into the hidden job markets and encouraging employers to hire from afar; and the way individuals interact with the new immigrants on a daily basis, either welcoming them or treating them as unwelcome guests. *The ways in which a community works to provide these services affects the degree to which immigrants can become assimilated into their community, and ultimately, affects the prosperity of the community as those immigrants contribute to its development.*

Thus, a welcoming community needs to begin with the long-term vision of how these newcomers will become valued and equal participants in the progressive development of the city. Such a vision is based on respect for the newcomers as persons with skills, abilities and strengths that they will contribute, and as carrying new and valued perspectives and insights. It is important to understand that Diversity provides a fertile ground of resources which increases the resilience and adaptability of a community. Taking a broader perspective opens a community to gaining and learning from the newcomers, and welcoming them with open arms.

Barriers to Welcoming Communities

Some specific barriers to the creation of welcoming communities have been identified by researchers.

External Barriers: Outside the scope of the community

- Although currently well funded, the downloading of responsibilities from the provincial level to municipalities without the equal provision of funding has made it hard to meet the many needs of immigrants as well as residents.
- Agencies are rarely given funding for services to non-immigrants (e.g., students). Communities take their money for tuition and services, but do not help them adequately to acclimate.
- Accreditation is one of two key needs of new immigrants. Work is being done towards facilitating credentialing of foreign professionals at both the provincial and federal levels.
- Housing shortages, cost and suitability are all barriers to successful settlement. There is no link between immigration policy and housing policy, and thus, no effective form of federal or provincial support for meeting the housing needs of immigrants.

Internal Barriers: Within the scope of the community

- Immigrant Deficit model: The existing models for working with immigrants do not recognize them as active contributors to the community. Instead, they are seen as a series of needs to be met by local resources. The resulting perspective is negative (immigrants seen as a burden rather than a resource); disempowering (immigrants are treated as incapable rather than capable of meaningful contributions); and divisive (immigrants are not treated as full people and equal members of society, but as a separate group who are serviced by agencies).
- Language training. Language training is the second key need of new immigrants. While funding is provided by the province for the main ESL programs, there is a lot that communities can do to promote ESL access. Conversation groups, buddy systems, volunteer classes, employer or community financial support for fee-based ESL programs are all options.
- The expense and shortage of housing in Kelowna is a problem. In terms of housing style, issues such as secondary suites, desire for different home styles, and the need for homes with more bedrooms have all been cited as areas that require flexibility and support from municipalities.

Successes - Existing Programs and services in Kelowna

- Education – ESL classes, youth ambassador program, creation and distribution of curriculum and training materials.
- Business/Employment – Skills Connect (bridging programs), Credential Evaluation, Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), business counseling and investment, Return to Nursing program.
- Agency services – settlement services, culturally welcoming volunteer program, Critical Incident Response Model, ESL, host and buddy, Welcoming and Inclusive Communities.
- Multiple partners – Dialogues on multiculturalism, Mosaic 150 grant, Changing Face of Kelowna grant, community forums, presentations, workshops, trainings & conferences on diversity, immigration, and multiculturalism.

Best Practices for Welcoming Communities

The following components are crucial to the formation of a welcoming and inclusive community:

1. A Welcoming Population

The foundation of a welcoming community is a welcoming population. Attitudes of city residents towards newcomers give rise to policies and behaviors that welcome or reject. As well, positive and negative encounters with individuals affect whether a newcomer experiences a city as welcoming or otherwise. This can be accomplished through educating for a welcoming climate, ensuring that there are leisure activities and orientation services that welcome newcomers, and protecting newcomers' rights through policies and education.

2. Local-level Responsibility and Commitment

Immigrants can integrate better in smaller centres than in big cities, but only if we can welcome them appropriately. The two main reasons immigrants choose what community to settle in are family and community infrastructure. Thus, building up appropriate, supportive infrastructure is a key way to attract and retain new immigrants. The community needs individuals who will adopt the cause of promoting immigration and integration, inspiring others to work with them.

3. Strategic Partnerships: Coordinate and Collaborate with Diverse Groups

Building strategic partnerships among diverse groups is a key to becoming a welcoming community. Involving people who have themselves been immigrants is vital to building an effective partnership. They will understand the unique barriers of immigrants and have valuable insights into how to facilitate their

welcome in the community. Building a team is essential: a team that can spearhead activities, and also coordinate and liaise with the diverse groups involved.

4. Language Training and Support

Central coordination of all language learning opportunities can enable more people to find times and locations that fit their schedules. As well, expansion of language training into the evening and weekend hours allows newcomers to continue working while improving their English. This allows them to become more comfortable with their new community and speeds integration.

A linguistically welcoming environment includes universal signage and the use of symbols or plain language in signs, websites for the city and city services translated into other languages, signs and flyers translated into some of the main languages used in the city, multilingual employees or interpreters at key government agencies, and businesses staffed with some proportion of speakers of other languages.

A diverse linguistic environment is particularly important in schools and medical facilities. Best practices include ESL training for public school teachers, availability and advertising of the services of professional interpreters at hospitals, registry of doctors who speak languages other than English and French, with referrals for newcomers to these service providers.

5. Economic and Employment Factors

Access to appropriate employment opportunities is essential to being a welcoming community. Employment is often the first draw to an area, though the quality of the working experience will affect whether newcomers stay in the area. If the jobs are good, with good pay and positive working conditions, and the newcomers are provided with other essential supports (e.g., language training), retention and integration are highly probable. Assistance with finding jobs for spouses is another important consideration that follows soon after the first spouse finds a job. Without work opportunities for the whole family, they are less likely to be settled in the community.

6. Housing and Transportation

The availability, quality, cost and style of housing are all relevant in creating a housing market that welcomes newcomers. Even if a newcomer has found a good job, she or he is not likely to stay if affordable and appropriate housing is not available. Availability and ease of use of public transit play a key role in helping newcomers feel at ease and independent in their new community.

Successful initiatives in housing and transportation include modifications of new rental requirements such as references, which can be difficult for international immigrants to procure, alternate arrangements for fees such as damage deposits, which can be a significant initial barrier to finding housing, making available discounted or free passes on public transit for newcomers for their first period in the city.

7. Political Support and Integration

There are two important aspects of political life that facilitate integration: government support for immigration and newcomers, and their involvement in the political and social life of their new community.

Government support is essential for immigration success. Governments allocate resources, support by-laws and promote the development of the city. Government can also provide leadership by actively involving newcomers into the life of the city: seeking their feedback on proposals for by-laws and development; encouraging diverse community members to run for elected office; appointing representatives of different subgroups to city committees and task forces. Municipal government can provide leadership in creating jobs; hiring visible minorities and immigrants; and facilitating diversity on committees and panels.

Recognition of international credentials is a significant barrier to many newcomers, and often makes them feel disrespected and undervalued. While credential recognition occurs at a provincial and federal level, municipalities can present their views to the relevant agencies, pushing for more streamlined and fair systems.

The political inclusion of immigrants is a key factor in successful settlement. The political role of newcomers needs to extend beyond providing them with services to facilitating their active involvement in the political and public life of the city.

8. Long-term Vision

While successful immigration depends on meeting the immediate needs of newcomers and addressing the many challenges that arise in their first months and years in Canada, it also requires keeping present the *bigger vision of full integration*.

The city and participating groups need to conduct regular evaluation of how the city is moving towards immigrant integration and developing welcoming behaviors. Regular evaluation will help ensure that the city is moving in that direction, and guide adjustments to activities needed to better reach that goal.

A key element to this research is gathering regular feedback from newcomers about all aspects of their experience. Gathering their views and integrating them into planning will help ensure that the city progressively refines its practices and gets closer to becoming truly welcoming.

G. Public Forum

A one hour live public forum arranged by CBC Radio (88.9) was held at Okanagan College on September 25, 2008. All the project participants and others were invited to attend. The forum was preceded by a number of radio interviews with immigrants and in addition to CBC radio, CHBC Television and the Capital News provided coverage on the day of the forum.

The program included a report of the project findings and a response by the panel comprising the mayor, ISCO co-president, UBCO professor and the Foreign Skilled Worker Coordinator from the Economic Development Commission. Questions from the floor were answered by the panel members.

After the live broadcast, participants were divided into facilitated groups focusing on diversity, language support, social support, workplace support and service delivery. Below is a summary of the recommendations from these five groups:

Housing:

- Hiring a half time housing coordinator to help newcomers find accommodation
- Involving the business community, service clubs, and employers to solve the housing issue
- Looking at other models (e.g. Portland)
- Changing the mindset about living in high rises. More density, less urban sprawl – alternate housing such as condos, basement suites, more bedrooms in homes
- Tapping into alternate sources of funding (philanthropical, donated property)

Information:

- Better marketing of existing services
- Translated information re basic services (e.g., daycare, housing, ESL) available pre-landing and at airport
- More outreach into community

Services:

- Centralization of services – everything in one place for immigrants
- Visible and accessible mentors available

Language support:

- Need ESL support for older adults, women, after school ESL for children
- More flexible hours for services
- More flexibility in who is allowed community ESL support; clearer guidelines for eligibility

- Volunteer teachers need more TESL training
- Need to ensure ESL children remain proud of their culture.
- Connect newcomers to “sister” family/friends to build support

Social support:

- Liaise with newcomer club and welcome wagon to ensure services targeted at immigrants.
- Assign (visible minority) volunteer hosts to be a “welcome team” to greet immigrants at airport and hand out translated information sheet of basic services and contact information
- Create a community within a community (arts/culture, community centres) - places for people to get to know others and create a sense of belonging
- Deliver more education/training to help people accept and embrace differences
- Create a central meeting place or use universities, schools; church halls, community centres, or libraries for people to gather
- Providing services and support for spouses/family members of employees (job seeking, housing) will increase the chances of retention of employees.
- It is harder to provide services if on temporary visa (education not being recognized) but something should be done to help these workers.
- Canada should support the notion of family reunification - having family already here is a strength because it helps newcomers settle and deal with issues that may arise in the new community

Workplace support:

- Programs to get Canadian experience should be implemented - volunteering first is one option.
- Accent is a barrier and should be addressed through training
- Employers should help employees get to work! (transportation) and to find accommodation initially
- Mentorship programs would help any newcomer
- There should be expanded services for temporary foreign workers which includes knowing more about their legal rights and responsibilities

General:

- Diversity – we need dedicated activists!
- Focus on positive but don’t ignore the problems – talking about both sides is critical
- “A welcoming door for them to open”

H. Conclusions

There are a number of central themes that re-occur throughout all the data gathered. And there are some next steps which would require minimal funding to implement. The most promising of those include:

- Strategic partnerships of service providers in terms of the delivery of ESL and services for immigrants. This partnership can address so many of the recommendations for better coordination of services, better and combined promotion and marketing of products and services, the sharing of resources, the avoidance of duplication of services,
- Strategic partnerships among business, developers, real estate companies, community and government to address housing and transportation.
- Strategic partnerships among employers to look into creative ways to help new immigrant workers to gain Canadian experience (such as mentorship programs), help with housing and transportation, coordinate diversity or language training, training for better recruitment and retention and to help spouses of employees with social adjustment and job seeking.

- The formation of a volunteer anti-racism committee to assist with information about human rights, legal rights and responsibilities, diversity policy development, referrals for diversity training, critical response to racist incidents, etc.
- Dialogue with community groups such as the Welcome Wagon, Kelowna Newcomer's Club, Chambers of Commerce, and service clubs to suggest adding special outreach programs and resources to include immigrants in their services

More long-term suggestions that will require resources include:

- Hiring a full- or part-time housing coordinator to research models, conduct a needs assessment, make recommendations and help form partnerships to implement the recommendations.
- Building or creating a central Cultural Centre or central meeting place where many cultures (including Canadians) can mix, staffed by paid staff and immigrant volunteers and providing services such as language classes, free daycare onsite, free transportation, career centre, resource centre, library of used foreign language books, ethnic food centres etc.
- Creating and translating documents such as information sheets of basic services for immigrants for the airport and the main embassies overseas; myths and facts about immigration, and credential evaluation. Besides print, this information could also be made available on a website.
- Creating a multilingual information line (models available elsewhere) for newcomers to call when they need information about services in Kelowna.
- Increasing funding for settlement programs, ESL, TESL training, training for community interpreters and users of interpreters.