



ACCESS, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
***“Re-examining our approaches to
Settlement and Integration”***

**Welcoming Communities Initiative
Brampton Roundtable Discussion Outcomes
with Community Residents**

July 17, 2008

On July 17, 2008, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) conducted its second Community Roundtable in Brampton as part of the **Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI)** project. The WCI is a three year project supported by Canadian Heritage and has been developed based on PROMPT's (Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades) research paper titled "*Smart Settlement: A Community Engagement Model for Sustainable Immigrant Settlement in Ontario's Smaller Communities*", which proposes a policy framework and model for sustainable and effective immigrant settlement.

WCI's objectives are to engage immigrants and municipalities as partners in building more inclusive and welcoming communities and to develop sustainable strategies that would facilitate the economic and social integration of immigrants.

The WCI is a community engagement project that will engage various stakeholders to:

- Identify the different settlement needs and issues in various municipalities across Ontario.
- Bridge social, cultural and economic differences that will enhance civic engagement.
- Engage different stakeholders (immigrants, government, educational institutions, employment sector, settlement agencies, ethno-cultural groups, etc.) to implement a suitable model which creates an inclusive and welcoming environment for immigrants and newcomers.
- Utilize various communication mechanisms (forum, consultation, and quarterly newsletter) to facilitate effective information exchange and to celebrate the contributions of immigrants.
- Foster partnerships between stakeholders to ensure equitable representation in the civic processes.

Purpose of the Community Roundtable Meeting

The purpose of the community roundtable meeting is to provide a forum for dialogue amongst multi-stakeholders and community members to discuss and share their perspective on civic engagement and other issues pertaining to access, equity and inclusion. The meeting on July 17th was solely for community members to share personal experiences and viewpoints on immigrant integration.

Discussion Context:

We need to look beyond employment and language training as being the priorities of settlement process, and promote the notion of treating immigrants as being equal citizens. Access, equity and inclusion are three important dimensions of immigrant integration within the context of multiculturalism. While many settlement services are striving to help newcomers find employment and improve their English proficiency, but the crucial questions remain:

- How do we help newcomers develop a sense of belonging and part of the community? A person of colour always being asked "Where do you come from?" is an indication of the problem.
- How do we shift the 'burden' of ensuring immigrant integration from being mainly a responsibility of immigrants to a joint responsibility shared in the community? The notion of creating a welcoming community is by connecting with immigrants as partners in the community building process.
- How do the public institutions deal with the growing presence of ethno-culturally diverse communities?

Below is a brief summary of the main discussion points.

Q. How can we build a community that creates a sense of belonging? What are the challenges facing immigrants in the context of integration and civic participation? Needs of access, equity and inclusion in your community.

Economic Exclusion and Poverty:

- The requirement of “Canadian Experience” was identified as a major barrier for newcomers and immigrants entering the labour market. Employers are reluctant to hire newcomers because of their accent. As a result, this creates an immense economic pressure on the newcomers families in meeting the essential needs such as shelter, feeding and clothing.
- Another burden on the newcomer is the *three months waiting period for the OHIP card*. When it is the first three months that newcomers needs it most. The question that rises here is that; are the \$10,000 (that are required to be brought by the newcomers) really enough to cover their medical and health problems, when there are economic hardships such as food, clothing and shelter being faced by them?
- As most of the newcomers and immigrants have to upgrade their education and language skills through colleges and universities, this is a step that requires monetary contribution. The newcomer cannot get a loan approved right away for his or her studies because the system requires them to build credibility with the credit bureau for one year, before they can be approved for a loan to study.

Political Exclusion:

- Newcomers have no say at any level (ie: voting right) in the government that is at the municipal, provincial or federal level until they become citizens of Canada.

Obstacles to Voluntarism:

There is a lack of collaboration within the ethnic community to promote voluntarism. For example hospitals do not have translators for newcomers, where the ethnic newcomer cannot communicate about their health problems.

Other major barriers facing Brampton’s immigrants and community as a whole include:

- Lack of access and space for seniors
- Lack of education on equity & diversity
- Intergenerational gap between immigrants (the second generation youth are disconnected from the mainstream communities, and many parents (1st generation) are not aware of education system)

Q. How can we ensure that the visible minority have full access to public services and resources including space?

- **Communication is essential.** There is a suggestion that as soon as the newcomers land in Canada there should be an Information Package from the local destination government for the new residents. Also, the government stakeholders should be more proactive (not only during election campaigns) to communicate with the immigrants through the use of ethnic media.

- **Increase of representation of visible minorities in government institutions.**

There needs to be more representation quota wise from the municipal to provincial and the federal levels of the government. Only fair representation at these levels for the newcomer will not only bring about quicker changes in laws and justice by the Canadian government but it will also help towards an easier transition into the Canadian system for the newcomer.

- **Settlement sector move away from SILOS and collaborate with government.**

The settlement sector (language training, job search assistance etc) does not have the capacity to address immigrant integration needs while their mandate and resources are dedicated to provide settlement services. "We are working within the circles," said one participant. We need collaborations and opportunities from the governments to increase our capacity not only to serve immigrant needs but to help them integrate into the larger community.

- **Proactive involvement from City Council.**

Q. How can we engage newcomers and immigrants to participate in public decision making processes?

- **Increase representation of visible minorities at all levels of government.**

As discussed in the questions above, fair representation of the newcomers and visible minorities at all the three levels of the government can provide the newcomer the motivation to participate in public decision making processes. For example, the Carabram should represent not only the ethnic minority residing in Brampton but the majority should also be an equal partner in it too.

Note: This above summary might not necessarily capture all the discussions took place at the roundtable meeting. If you would like to include any additional and/or missing information, please contact Lele Truong.

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