



**Putting Equity  
on the Agenda:**

**ARE WE  
BEING HEARD?**

Equity Campaign in York Region  
December 2009  
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

Front Cover Photographs  
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# York Region Equity Campaign Report

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Dear Colleagues:

We are delighted to present to you the highlights of the discussions about equity that we have had over the last year in York Region. First of all, on behalf of CASSA, I would like to thank all the stakeholders, particularly community residents, who participated in the community dialogues, roundtable discussions, surveys and the community forum. The input provided by all of you in this process is extremely valuable and much appreciated.

First and foremost, CASSA would like to acknowledge the progress that has been made by Municipalities, School Boards and non-profit Agencies in York Region. We are pleased to see many initiatives, policies and programs by all three sectors to advance access, equity and inclusion. The purpose of this report is to engage in constructive dialogues on how we can move forward faster. Addressing inequities in a timely manner, with the partnership of those affected, is critical to building an inclusive York Region.

While we have tried to capture most of the discussion topics, we would like to acknowledge limitations of this report. Firstly, we had confined most of the community outreach to the three municipalities in the south of York Region. It is important to have additional resources allocated to reach out to other municipalities in the Region. Secondly, the details in this report are in no way comprehensive, as there are many other topics that could and should be discussed when it comes to access, equity and inclusion. With additional efforts from many stakeholders like us, we can explore additional topics in coming years. Thirdly, the points being presented here are not based on quantitative data. This report merely reflects the suggestions of issues and solutions put forward by the stakeholders during the campaign. In order to quantify many of the issues being raised, we will definitely need further research to be done in York Region.

The major purpose of this report is to begin new conversations and to expand on existing conversations in the Region around access, equity and inclusion. We invite municipal governments, school boards and non-profit agencies to join us in these conversations and in engaging immigrants, newcomers and people of colour in a meaningful manner as community builders. It is important that we all work together proactively to address inequities that exist in our Region. In the spirit of collective effort, CASSA has been working with a dedicated group of service providers and residents to develop an equity council in the Region. The goals of this resident-led council include addressing local equity issues through education, research and advocacy. The council will also strive to be responsive to community concerns and encourage active member participation.

I would like to thank all CASSA staff including Anita Khanna, Fatima Sajan and Arran Liddel for their contribution to the *Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD?* campaign and report. Thank you also to Anu Radha Verma for writing up this report and Karishma Kripalani for compiling the information from our sessions and surveys. Finally, we thank all local organizations, including Social Planning Council of York Region and Social Services Network of York Region, for supporting this campaign.

Sincerely,

Neethan Shan  
Executive Director

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

York Region is rapidly changing and growing - between 2001 and 2006 the population increased by 22 per cent, the number of visible minorities grew by 53 per cent, and the number of low-income households increased by 55 per cent. As the Region grows and changes, there are challenges in terms of inequity, and newcomers and immigrants are especially vulnerable. Municipalities and community institutions must be prepared to address these challenges in order to ensure a safe and healthy Region for all residents.

*Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD?*, a York Region equity campaign, was launched in 2009 by the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA). The campaign created spaces for dialogue on the issues facing newcomers and immigrants in the Region, hearing community concerns and recommendations. The key concepts used are equity, access and inclusion.

The York Region equity campaign is one component of the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI), a three-year community engagement project of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. WCI is informed by the Smart Settlement Model, which proposes a policy framework and a model for smaller communities that is sustainable settlement focused. In the model, immigrants are viewed as partners in community building and leadership, social and human capital (key building blocks) are encouraged.

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) is a social justice umbrella organization working with Ontario's diverse South Asian communities. It works to create social change by building alliances and working collaboratively with those who share a vision of empowering all communities to participate in defining Canada's future.

The aim of the equity campaign was to put equity issues on the agenda in York Region and to mobilize community members around these issues. Multiple methods were employed to engage residents including youth, seniors and women, municipalities, service providers and representatives from school boards. These methods were community dialogues, open-ended response questionnaires, surveys and an equity forum. The campaign used a participatory community engagement approach. Each of the methods allowed for a more inclusive way of discussing equity. All of the methods asked about experiences, barriers (community concerns) and recommendations. The process was only made possible by the numerous community partners.

At the forum in May 2009, community members discussed equity issues around education, public space and civic participation, social change, youth justice, seniors as agents of change and gender equity. The issues identified (community concerns) and recommendations can be understood around these six themes, and through three targets (policy, civic engagement and service delivery).

### **Highlights of community concerns**

- Many immigrant and newcomer parents feel disconnected from the school system
- School curriculum is not representative and reflective of the diversity of students
- Municipal governments are not representative of diversity within Region
- Lack of translators, interpreters or translations for municipal and community services
- Racial profiling of youth
- Retirement homes are not appropriate for racialized seniors
- Transportation barriers exist for seniors
- Subsidized housing shortages are especially affecting women in Region

### **Highlights of Recommendations**

- More inclusive curriculum that includes equity, immigration and civic education
- Review hiring practices within municipalities
- Better outreach about how to access services with a focus on newcomer services
- Increase availability of rehabilitation alternatives for youth (community rehabilitation)
- Creation and expansion of intergenerational programs
- Increase poverty reduction strategies to address the feminization of poverty

The list of community concerns and recommendations outlined in this report is not exhaustive, but can be seen as an indicator of areas of concern. It is our hope that these issues will continue to be discussed, and we are looking forward to the recommendations being taken up by all those that serve the diverse communities of York Region.

## INTRODUCTION

York Region is rapidly changing and growing – between 2001 and 2006 the population increased by 22 per cent, the number of visible minorities<sup>1</sup> grew by 53 per cent, and the number of low-income households increased by 55 per cent<sup>2</sup>; in 2009 over 40 per cent of students in the York Region District School Board identified their first language as one other than English.<sup>3</sup> As the Region becomes more diverse, there are challenges that municipalities and community institutions must be prepared to address to ensure a safe and healthy Region for current and future residents. In the context of a rapidly changing region, an equity lens is most useful – one that is informed by the concepts of **access**, **equity** and **inclusion**. Keeping this in mind, *Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD?*, a York Region equity campaign, was launched in 2009 by the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA). The campaign created spaces for dialogue on issues facing newcomers and immigrants in the Region. This report compiles the campaign’s work, putting community concerns and recommendations forward.

### The Campaign

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) initiated *Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD?* in York Region in 2009; it emerged out of the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI). The local partners for this campaign were Social Services Network and the Social Planning Council of York Region. Working within a framework of access, equity and inclusion, the campaign invited community members to share their views on education systems, police and justice, service provision, municipal and regional service delivery, representation and more as they relate to newcomers and immigrants. Using a participatory community engagement model that views residents as partners in decision-making processes, the campaign used a number of methods to interact with community members through the spring of 2009. These methods included community dialogues, surveys and a full-day forum. Dozens of community members attended the community dialogues, completed the open-ended response questionnaires and surveys, and over a hundred individuals participated in the forum.

### The Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI)

The Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) is a three-year community engagement project of CASSA, funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. WCI works within a framework of access, equity and inclusion, and aims 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 to implement a suitable model which creates an inclusive and welcoming environment for immigrants and newcomers

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<sup>1</sup> Visible Minorities, as identified by the *Employment Equity Act*, are “persons, other than Aboriginal person, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” For a note about this definition, see page 10 Box 3 in the Background and Context section of this report.

<sup>2</sup> York Region Fact Sheet on Employment and Equity.

<sup>3</sup> *Pathways to Equity*, York Region District School Board, Volume 17, Issue 2, Winter 2009, page 4, retrieved from <http://www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/pdfs/a/depts/racere/Pathways17-2.pdf>

- Utilize various communication mechanisms to facilitate effective information exchange
- Faster partnerships between stakeholders to ensure equitable representation in the civic processes

There are several components of WCI, several of which are ongoing:

- (1) On-the-ground projects in smaller municipalities; 2009-2010 projects are in Peterborough and Waterloo
- (2) Work on access to trades – In April 2009, a report “Access to Trades for Newcomers in Ontario” was released by CASSA; a task force was also created
- (3) Website to provide support to service providers and smaller municipalities on issues of settlement
- (4) Communication tools promoting immigrant engagement
- (5) Work in York Region on equity including the campaign and an Equity Council
- (6) Evaluation

**Smart Settlement Model**

WCI is informed by the Smart Settlement Model, which came out of a 2005 discussion paper commissioned by the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT), an advocacy initiative formerly located at CASSA. The discussion paper, entitled “Smart Settlement: Current Dispersion Policies and a Community Engagement Model for Sustainable Immigrant Settlement in Ontario’s Smaller Communities” proposes a policy framework and a model for immigrant settlement in smaller communities that is sustainability-focused. In the model, immigrants are viewed as partners in community building (i.e. seeing immigrants as more than economic units who provide labour), and three key building blocks to promote sustainable immigrant settlement (leadership, social and human capital) are encouraged. The executive summary of the discussion paper is found in the Appendices section of this report.

**Box 1**  
**Smart Settlement**  
 “Immigrants that are engaged in community building are much more likely to develop a stake in their new community and a strong sense of belonging – community equity.”  
 PROMPT Discussion paper, p22

**The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)**

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) is a social justice umbrella organization working with Ontario’s diverse South Asian communities. CASSA’s mission is to facilitate the economic, social, political and cultural empowerment of South Asians by serving as a resource for information, research, mobilization, coordination and leadership on social justice issues affecting our communities. It works to create social change by building alliances and working collaboratively with those who share a vision of empowering all communities to participate in defining Canada’s future. CASSA has been engaged in this work for over twenty years, and is currently located in Scarborough.

CASSA’s Vision: Envision and strive for a Canada free from all forms of discrimination in which all communities are free from marginalization and are fully empowered to participate in defining Canada’s political, economic, social and cultural future.

CASSA's Values: Social justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, responsiveness, diversity, collaboration and solidarity, and accountability.

CASSA's Strategic Directions for 2008-2010: Poverty reduction, the coordination of access to health and wellness, strengthening the communities' capacity to address inter-generational and family relationship issues, and strengthening responsiveness to community stakeholders.

### **Key Concepts**

Access, equity and inclusion are key concepts for the York Region equity campaign.

Access can be understood as equal opportunity for all community members. Access is related to equity, in that structural barriers (inaccessibility) reduce equitability.

Equity must be understood within a framework of marginalization, where some communities disproportionately experience marginalization due to structural issues. Adequate opportunities and benefits are to be provided to all, recognizing that equitable treatment does not necessarily mean equal treatment. Marginalized groups must have access to opportunities (services, resources, etc.) that are reflective of their needs.

Inclusion can be understood as policies or practices that work to identify and address structural barriers that result in marginalization. Decision-making can be made inclusive by including and valuing the contributions of all community members, especially those whose daily lives are to be most impacted by the decisions.<sup>4</sup>

### **Report Structure**

The purpose of this report is to present a summary of the community input from the York Region equity campaign on issues facing newcomers and immigrants. This report will detail the community concerns and recommendations identified by community members, using the framework of access, equity and inclusion. York Region residents, service providers, community stakeholders, government including municipal authorities, school boards and others will find this report useful.

The **Background** and **Context** provide various data about York Region that is especially relevant to issues facing newcomers and immigrants. This data include demographics and labour market statistics. This background information leads to understanding the context of the Region's issues. The scope and limitations of the campaign are also detailed in this section.

The **Approach** section details the various methods used for hearing about issues in York Region through the equity campaign, and the overarching framework of participatory community engagement.

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<sup>4</sup> Understanding these concepts was informed by definitions from The Institute of Inclusion, the Equity and Inclusion Campaign, the City of Toronto and Crooks, V.A. and Andrews, G.J. (2009).

In the **Community Concerns** section, the issues that came up in the community dialogues, open-ended response questionnaires, surveys and the forum are listed. These community concerns are organized in sections based on the sessions from the May 9, 2009 forum. The sections are: education systems, civic participation and public space, social change in the community, youth justice, seniors as agents of change and gender equity.

Based on what was heard from community members, the **Recommendations** are listed in the section by the same name, where they are arranged using three targets (policy, civic engagement and service delivery). This report can be used as a point of conversation with public institutions like schools and health care centres, municipalities and service providers.

The section on **York Region Equity Council** provides information about the process of forming an equity council with a diverse membership. The formation of this council is intimately related to the York Region equity campaign. This report provides information on the formation of the Council up to December 2009.

The **Conclusions** section closes this report with reflections on the process and points to the directions further equity work in York Region could take.

Key documents used are listed in the **References** section.

In the **Appendices** section, some background information and the tools used to gather information from community members can be found.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Regional Municipality of York is made up of nine municipalities with a total population of 1,011,360.<sup>5</sup> The Region consists of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville. There is also a reserve where the community of the Chippewas of Georgina Island reside.

### Box 2

#### York Region at a glance:

Regional Population in 2008: 1,011,360  
Of which, the most populated municipalities:  
Markham in 2008: 297,932; Vaughan in 2008: 270,405 and Richmond Hill in 2008: 185,217  
Regional Immigrant Population in 2006: 43 per cent of total  
2001 to 2006: Population increased by 22 per cent  
Regional Jobs in 2006: 500,060 (3<sup>rd</sup> largest in Ontario)  
Regional Jobs in mid-2008: 495,000  
Regional Jobs that are service-oriented: 74 per cent of total  
1998-2008: employment grew at three per cent per year  
2001 to 2006: Regional labour force grew by 22 per cent  
Regional Visible Minorities: 43 per cent of total population  
Markham Visible Minorities: 65 per cent of total population (highest in Canada)  
Source: York Region, see [www.york.ca/yrscd](http://www.york.ca/yrscd)

*York Region is a place of growth.*

Between 2001 and 2006, the population grew by 22 per cent, making it the fastest growing census division in Ontario and the third in Canada.<sup>6</sup>

*York Region is a place of diversity.*

As of 2006, 329,955 visible minorities (see Box 3) were living in York Region – that

accounts for seven per cent of the total visible minority population of Canada. Within the Region, 43 per cent of the population are visible minorities. Three out of ten visible minority residents in the Region were born in Canada. The highest proportion of visible minorities in Canada is found in Markham, where 65 per cent of the population are visible minorities.<sup>7</sup>

*The diversity in York Region is growing.*

Between 2001 and 2006, the number of visible minorities increased by 53 per cent. Immigrants account for almost 60 per cent of the total population growth in the Region between 2001 and 2006. Recent immigrants have increased by 7 per cent within the same time frame.<sup>8</sup>

### Box 3

#### Visible Minorities

Visible minorities refer to “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” as per *Employment Equity Act*. While the term is commonly used in data collection by Statistics Canada, CASSA and many organizations prefer “people of colour” or “racialized.”

*There are challenges in terms of inequity.*

Between 2001 and 2006, the number of low income households increased by 55 per cent. In 2006, the majority (82 per cent) of low income residents lived in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, the three southern-most municipalities in York Region. It is estimated that approximately half of all tenants in Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Newmarket, Georgina and Whitchurch-Stouffville may have struggled with housing affordability.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> December 31, 2008 estimates, as per York Region. York Region Facts.

<sup>6</sup> York Region Fact Sheet on Housing and Shelter Costs in York Region.

<sup>7</sup> York Region Fact Sheet on Ethnic Origin and Visible Minorities.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> York Region Fact Sheet on Employment and Income.

*Newcomers and immigrants are especially vulnerable.*

The shortage of affordable housing in the suburbs of York Region combined with immigrants' low incomes result in housing challenges. These are more pronounced for women and seniors.<sup>10</sup>

We know that newcomers and immigrants of colour disproportionately experience poverty (the *racialization of poverty*), and that this is because of structural barriers and systemic marginalization.<sup>11</sup> We also know that racism and racialization impact the lives of people of colour in Canada including newcomers and immigrants of colour – for example, the disturbing incidents of attacks against Asian-Canadian anglers in various areas of Ontario, including York Region. These attacks have resulted in serious injuries, criminal proceedings and heightened fear. These reports have prompted changes to York Region police policies and practices, community groups taking up race relations and an Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) inquiry (see Box 4).

**Box 4**

**Asian-Canadian Anglers**

In 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released *Fishing Without Fear*, which detailed their inquiry into the attacks against Asian-Canadian anglers, confirming that racial profiling played a role. The report also made recommendations for municipalities, police services, school boards, etc.  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/issues/racism/anglerinquiry/anglerinquiry>

attacks against Asian-Canadian anglers in various areas of Ontario, including York Region. These attacks have resulted in serious injuries, criminal proceedings and heightened fear. These reports have prompted changes to York Region police policies and practices, community groups taking up race relations and an Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) inquiry (see Box 4).

There are many examples of organizations and institutions taking action on equity discrimination in York Region. A few highlights include:

- York Region District School Board's Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy, Race Relations Advisory Committee and Community and Cultural Services Unit
- York Regional Police Diversity and Cultural Resources Bureau
- City of Vaughan's joining the Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD)
- Principles of diversity, equality and equity in York Region's Vision 2026
- Regional Character Council, attributes include inclusiveness and fairness

Expansion of policies and practices, as well as the creation of more spaces and forums for greater equity-focused work in York Region, are needed in order to be proactive on the challenges facing the rapidly-changing Region.

**Scope and Limitations**

The information gathered and presented in this report should be considered a set of indicators of areas of concern. The findings are qualitative in nature. Many of the individual and organizations engaged through the York Region equity campaign are located in the southern areas of the Region, namely the municipalities of Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham. To take further the issues related to access, equity and inclusion in York Region identified in this report, research and advocacy work must be explored.

<sup>10</sup> Preston et al., 2009, "At Risk in the Suburbs? Immigrants' Housing Needs and Challenges in York Region."

<sup>11</sup> The Colour of Poverty Campaign, <http://colourofpoverty.ca>

## APPROACH

The aim of the campaign was to put equity issues on the agenda in York Region and to mobilize community members around these issues. Multiple methods were employed to engage residents including youth, seniors and women, municipalities, service providers, and representatives from school boards.

The methods were:

- (a) Community dialogues
- (b) Open-ended response questionnaires
- (c) Surveys
- (d) Forum

### Box 5

#### Priorities Identified in 2008 Community Roundtables

- (1) meaningful volunteer opportunities
- (2) access to meaningful employment
- (3) engagement of immigrant youth
- (4) access to public space
- (5) diversity in curriculum
- (6) access to information (e.g. civic)
- (7) civic engagement

### Framework

To engage community members around issues of equity in York Region, the campaign used a participatory community engagement approach. Each of the methods utilised allowed for a more inclusive way of discussing equity. Each of the methods was designed to allow an opportunity for reflection on their experiences (or the experiences of those they know) in York Region. All of the methods asked about experiences, barriers (community concerns) and recommendations. With multiple methods, community members were able to self-

select the method(s) they felt most comfortable with and contributed in at least one of the four methods.

### Method 1: Community Roundtables and Dialogues

Community Roundtables and Dialogues are small-scale engagement exercises where a diverse group of community members come together, including residents, service providers and representatives from municipalities. Guiding questions and concepts help to frame the discussions.

WCI first engaged with community members in York Region in 2008 with community roundtables in Markham and Vaughan (see Box 5 for priorities identified). In the spring of 2009, community dialogues were held in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan at community centres and social service agencies as part of the York Region Equity campaign.

### Method 2: Open-Ended Response Questionnaires

Open-ended response questionnaires were provided to those who participated in the community dialogues. These forms asked community members to

**“Please use this form to share any thoughts, experiences or recommendations that might enable the municipalities, school boards and agencies to better serve our communities.”**

These questionnaires allowed community members to share anything they felt comfortable with, anything they felt was relevant. Many community members shared anecdotal information about barriers for newcomers and other marginalized groups.

### **Method 3: Surveys**

A survey was designed to increase community engagement, especially for community members who may not have attended any of the campaign events. The survey was available in two formats: online and paper. It asked community members' about their experiences with education, social service access, municipal decision-making and access to personal space. Personal information was an optional component of the survey. The survey can be found in the Appendices section of this report.

Online - Between March 25 and May 9, 2009, the survey was available online at the CASSA website. The link was distributed through a range of community networks.

Paper - The paper-based surveys were distributed to a range of community locations including community centres in Markham and Richmond Hill, schools in southern York Region, ethnic grocery and clothing stores, and at Pacific Mall in Markham.

#### **Box 6**

##### **Community Members' Experiences**

"When I was in grade 8 we were making masks with plaster in art class so the day we had to make them I asked my teacher where I should go because I couldn't take my scarf off. But she got really upset with me but let me go into another room to do it but the room still didn't help because every 5 minutes a boy would come inside to use the sinks. When I went home I told my parents and they called the homeroom teacher but nothing really came out of it."

"I have no idea where the nearest shelter/soup/kitchen/food bank is, and have no idea how to go about locating one!"

"In terms of getting on a career path, it's important that there are more volunteer opportunities in York Region. By this I mean opportunities to improve your skills, so that it's worth putting on your resume. For example, I was trying to get my foot in the door in the health care field, and York Region Public Health doesn't offer any volunteer opportunities."

### **Method 4: The Forum**

On May 9, 2009, a public forum on equity was held at Bur Oak Secondary School in Markham from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. The forum was an integral component of the York Region equity campaign, and provided an opportunity to discuss resident-identified concerns and visions for a more equitable, accessible and inclusive York Region. This forum was supported by over twenty organizations including The Social Planning Council of York Region, Social Services Network of York

Region, Chinese Canadian National Council, SPACE Coalition, Toronto & York Region Labour Council, Sandgate Women's Shelter and African Canadian Social Development Council.

Transportation was organized to facilitate attendance and participation in the forum, including the arrangement of buses for seniors and youth groups. Over 100 York Region community members participated in the forum, engaging in discussions on a range of topics related to access, equity and inclusion.

There were two sets of concurrent dialogue sessions with facilitators and key panellists present to share their insights:

(1) Empowerment and Education – facilitated by Fatima Sajan; key panellists were Asrar Masoom Ali, Cecil Roach and Donna Cardoza.

(2) Public Space and Civic Participation – facilitated by Neethan Shan; key panellists were Danny Leong, Nadine Daley and Councillor David Cohen.

(3) Serving the Community: Charity to Social Change - facilitated by Anita Khanna; key panellists were Rummana Virji, Haran Vijayanathan and Nirmala Persaud.

(4) Doing Youth Justice: Policing and Engagement - facilitated by Neethan Shan; key panellists were Daniel Michael, Derakhshan Ali and Odion Oseggyefo.

(5) Seniors as Agents of Change - facilitated by Fatima Sajan; key panellists were Juswant Dhanjal, Fatima Razakazi, Amy Go and Noman Khalid Khan.

(6) Gender Equity in York Region - facilitated by Anita Khanna; key panellists were Nadia Warsi, Andrea Calver, Fariah Chowdhury and Rana Khan.

## **COMMUNITY CONCERNS**

Based on the various methodologies employed through the York Region equity campaign, a number of key issues were identified. Using the framework of the six sessions (or themes) from the equity forum, these community concerns are detailed below. The list of concerns identified below is not comprehensive. The list provides the major concerns that were highlighted throughout our conversations.

### **Education Systems**

- diverse students in the educational system not being supported adequately
- curriculum is not representative and reflective of the students
- marginalization of newcomer or immigrant students within the school by fellow students, teachers, guidance counsellors
- staff within schools are not representative of the communities
- many immigrant and newcomer parents feel disconnected from the school system
- resource shortages: student-teacher time, textbooks, extracurricular activities

### **Public Space & Civic Engagement**

- public spaces are not easily available, i.e. difficult to book, expensive, etc.
- costs are a barrier to participation in programs
- municipal governments are not representative of diversity within the Region
- municipal decision-making processes are not accessible and methods of civic engagement are limited

### **Social Change in the Community**

- lack of translators, interpreters, or translation for municipal and community services
- service content and delivery often insensitive to community's needs

### **Youth Justice**

- racial profiling is a problem
- an unequal relationship between policies/agencies and youth/communities exists

### **Seniors as Agents of Change**

- social isolation continues to be a problem for many seniors
- there is a risk of abuse
- retirement homes are often not appropriate for racialized seniors
- there are language barriers for programming/services
- transportation barriers exist as seniors find transportation expensive
- Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and its programs towards seniors are not adequately representative of racialized seniors

### **Gender Equity**

- feminization of poverty, where women (including newcomer women) are more prone to, and generally experience, poverty at higher rates
- subsidized housing shortages

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various methodologies employed through the equity campaign in York Region, community members identified recommendations that would help address the community concerns. Using the framework of the six sessions (or themes) from the equity forum, as well as three broad targets (policy, civic engagement and service delivery), the recommendations are outlined below.

### 1. Education Systems

#### ***Recommendations addressed to school boards, Ministry of Education***

*With youth present at the equity forum, many issues and recommendations came forward that seek to improve the experiences of newcomer and immigrant students and parents. School boards do have equity policies, committees and practices, but community members including students themselves were uncertain about them and recommend reviews and expansions.*

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#### **Policy**

- increase and expand hiring processes to make them more comprehensive to counter issues of representation in schools
- better mechanisms for arbitration between students and staff
- anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-homophobia mandate at all levels, including board, staff and committees
- review of training methods for teachers, staff and board – equity focused
- facilitating religious holidays associated with faiths other than Christianity
- student ombudsperson in every school
- a more inclusive curriculum that includes equity, immigration, civic education

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#### **Civic Engagement**

- community-inclusive process for selection of school principals

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#### **Service Delivery**

- more outreach programs to students and parents, especially newcomer families
  - more interpretation services, especially in school
  - provide halal meat in cafeterias
  - more support of special education students – reduce isolation, increase access to school space
  - publicize contacts students can approach regarding issues in school
  - expansion of student leadership programs around equity
  - incorporate diversity as part of service planning
  - publicize alternative marking options for students
-

## **2. Public Spaces & Civic Engagement**

### ***Recommendations addressed to municipalities***

*Many survey respondents described their experience with municipal services as being “neutral.” Discussions in community dialogues and at the equity forum gave community members the opportunity to discuss their concerns in detail. The economic barriers are a key concern, as well as representation.*

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#### **Policy**

- review of hiring practices within municipal system to reflect equity and diversity
  - expansion of equity policies, especially in terms of language availability
  - make developers responsible for building community centres as well as housing
- 

#### **Civic Engagement**

- municipalities need to reach out to marginalized communities about civic engagement
  - increase options of civic involvement include online methods
  - creation of an equity council or working group that includes municipal authorities
- 

#### **Service Delivery**

- make public spaces more accessible by lowering cost to book (or making free)
  - examine how public space is being used, i.e. public vs. private bookings
  - make programming more accessible by lowering costs
  - make transportation more accessible by lowering costs
  - expand Armadale community centre
  - increase interpretation services to reduce language barriers
- 

## **3. Social Change**

### ***Recommendations addressed to service providers, municipalities, Ministries***

*In moving from charity to social change, community members spoke of building capacity and expanding services to embrace a broader way of serving the community’s needs. Specific areas of concern in the current moment include providing support for newcomer and immigrant youth, and better outreach about services and how to access them.*

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#### **Policy**

- service providers and public institutions must proactively work from an anti-oppression, anti-racism mandate
  - through policy, build capacity to be more appropriate in both content and delivery
  - equity ombudsperson in municipality
  - establish strong policies to address hidden homelessness in Region
- 

#### **Service Delivery**

- food banks must be conscious of community needs (e.g. halal food)
  - better outreach on programming for especially marginalized groups of newcomers/immigrants, e.g. women experiencing domestic violence, queer youth, those facing mental health issues, immigrant youth, etc.
  - expansion of service delivery to the end-user
  - better outreach about how to access services, with focus on newcomer services
  - improvements to multi-lingual services
  - broad scale education about social justice
  - work with communities to serve them best
  - build networks to work collaboratively
-

#### **4. Youth Justice**

##### ***Recommendations addressed to Police services, Ministries***

*Youth expressed concern about their interactions with police in York Region through the equity campaign. The recommendations put forward are all policy related – community members saw structural change (through policy change) as necessary.*

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##### **Policy**

- anti-oppression, anti-racism training for police that is part of initial hiring and core competency
  - review of the complaints process (accessibility, effectiveness, inclusivity)
  - increased availability of rehabilitation alternatives for youth outside of criminal justice system (e.g. community rehabilitation)
  - review of accountability measures
- 

##### **Service Delivery**

- more programming for youth
  - opportunities for positive interactions between youth and police (e.g. basketball tournaments)
- 

#### **5. Seniors as Agents of Change**

##### ***Recommendations addressed to municipalities, service providers, Ministries***

*While seniors' services and programs exist in York Region, community members were concerned about costs and transportation, which can be significant barriers. With an aging population that is growing, addressing some of the community concerns now will equip the Region for the future.*

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##### **Policy**

- review practices and programs of Local Health Integration Network to make it more representative (especially of racialized seniors)
  - increase subsidized health services for seniors, e.g. dental care
  - create culturally appropriate retirement homes
- 

##### **Civic Engagement**

- civic engagement: civic education for seniors on accessing all levels of government
- 

##### **Service Delivery**

- creation and expansion of intergenerational programs (e.g. seniors tutoring youth)
  - needs assessment of different seniors groups
  - more accessible information about services available, data sharing
  - English language classes targeted to seniors
  - better transportation services and options at low cost for seniors
-

## **6. Gender Equity**

### ***Recommendations addressed to municipalities, service providers, Ministries***

*To address gender inequity, community members recommended engagement with policymakers and a broad-based approach for service providers.*

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#### **Policy**

- increase capital and structural funding related to childcare facilities
- 

#### **Civic Engagement**

- widen the spectrum of lobbying and advocacy and meet with MPPs regarding gender
  - work to address under-representation of women in political sphere
- 

#### **Service Delivery**

- agencies should get involved in a coalition of sorts
  - address stigma associated with accessing particular services, e.g. mental health, HIV/AIDS
  - increase poverty reduction strategies to address feminization of poverty
  - more inclusive programming to meet needs of specific needs of racialized women, e.g. recreational programs for hijab-wearing women
-

## **BUILDING AN EQUITY COUNCIL IN YORK REGION**

CASSA has partnered with Social Services Network and the Social Planning Council of York Region to build a voice around equity in York Region. CASSA is now spearheading the formation of an Equity Council in York Region.

The long-term goal of the Equity Council is to bring the barriers faced by newcomers, immigrants, people of colour and other equity seeking groups to the attention of York Region Municipalities and School Boards to ensure the accessibility of municipal resources, programs and rights for all community residents. The development of the council has included drafting the following:

### **Mission Statement:**

We are committed to promoting equity, access and inclusion for all residents of York Region through advocacy, education, collaboration and partnerships.

### **Values:**

We value and strive for:

- Diversity and participation of York Region community members
- Cultural appropriateness in our work
- Mutual learning based on the knowledge, skills, and experience we each bring;
- An anti-oppressive and anti-racist perspective which recognizes all forms of prejudice and discrimination against our community members
- Being inclusive and open to equity-related issues experienced by individuals
- Gender equality and respect for personal life choices

### **Objectives:**

- To realize the goals set by community members during the *Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD?* campaign,
- To function as an advocacy group to provide support to address inequity, inaccessibility or exclusion
- To provide community information, referrals, to conduct research and education work in York Region around access, equity and inclusion

The proposed council will consist of an elected executive membership and a general membership of residents, service providers and other community members committed to the principles of access, equity and inclusion. The inaugural members meeting will be held in early 2010. If you are interested in obtaining a nomination or membership form, please contact CASSA Community Engagement Coordinator Anita Khanna at [anita@cassa.on.ca](mailto:anita@cassa.on.ca) or 416 932 1359 x13.

## CONCLUSIONS

Documenting the York Region equity campaign – *Putting Equity on the Agenda – ARE WE BEING HEARD* - the key components in this report are the community concerns and recommendations. These are the voices of community members, including youth and seniors. Community members' experiences in the rapidly-changing Region provide insight into the ways municipalities, service providers, schools and others keep pace with this changing environment – or not. As noted, many of the voices were from southern York Region. Going forward, voices from diverse parts of the Region must be heard.

With the release of this report and the York Region Equity Council moving forward, it is our hope that the community concerns detailed here will continue to be discussed, within an equity framework. We are looking forward to the recommendations being taken up by service providers, municipalities, education systems, the equity council and others. We recognize that this report is not exhaustive by any means – further research and further advocacy work remains. We look forward to being engaged in that work.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A - Executive Summary of PROMPT's Smart Settlement Paper

### **Smart Settlement: *Current Dispersion Policies and a Community Engagement Model for Sustainable Immigrant Settlement in Ontario's Smaller Communities***

#### **Executive Summary**

With a mandate to "improve the economic and social integration of immigrants to Canada who are professionals and tradespeople," PROMPT commissioned a study to examine current settlement strategies. Increasingly all levels of government have espoused the dispersal of new immigrants in order to redistribute skilled labour, correct population decline and stimulate regional development in smaller centres. *Smart Settlement* proposes a policy framework and model for sustainable, effective immigrant settlement. Based on research, review and consultation, the model calls for engaging immigrants with local communities, while rejecting ineffective top-down measures.

Dispersion strategies, which offer new immigrants incentives to settle in smaller centres, have received wide attention from the federal, as well as provincial and municipal governments. These strategies have failed to produce long-term sustainable regional development because most immigrants move from the original place of settlement as soon as they have served their stipulated term. These approaches look at immigrants primarily as a source of labour. Having not been beneficiaries of a stake in the community beyond their value as a commodity, immigrants leave when better economic opportunities arise, leaving no lasting benefit to the host community either.

An alternative perspective is one in which immigrants are viewed as partners in community building and in their own integration. The alternative is based on three key building blocks for communities to promote sustainable immigrant settlement: leadership, social and human capital.

Local leadership is essential to affirming and steering the meaningful inclusion of immigrants in community building. A key part of leadership is gathering a critical mass of institutions that work as multi-stakeholder networks to plan and implement initiatives that produce synergy and a 'big bang' effect in community development. It is the cumulative effect of numerous progressive initiatives, policies and regulations at the local level that create the community conditions conducive to long-term immigrant engagement and participation. In addition to leadership and systemic inclusion, actively enabling social connections of immigrants to community networks enhances the social capital of both immigrants and the host community, and produces an environment of mutual exchange and participatory community building.

Furthermore, in order to reduce the likelihood of immigrants feeling isolated, especially in smaller cities, it is important for host communities to foster an effective link to networks and institutions that provide opportunities for further learning and advancement. These opportunities should be provided either locally or through accessible links to regional networks and institutions of learning.

Immigrants – like other people – have both short-term settlement and long-term settlement/community interests. Those who are engaged in community building are much more likely to develop a stake and a sense of belonging – community equity. Sustainable immigrant settlement in cities and regions can only be achieved through community-driven action.

Settlement service stakeholders, in order to be fully effective in enabling the meaningful participation of immigrants, will have to move further towards looking at immigrants as active contributors in this process. Sustainable and inclusive settlement outcomes require a move away from focusing exclusively on the initial settlement cycle stage of 'welcome' services, to the full spectrum of community connections and access to local social, political and economic institutions.

PROMPT's model for community engagement requires key elements to be realized:

- Pioneer an initiative with selected cities, which will require a champion or project leader to lead the building of contacts with local civic leaders and tapping into local business and social networks.
- Find a city partner with 1) a commitment to diversity and engaging new and meaningful community participation for immigrants; and that 2) has recognized – through key local leaders – the need to expand sustainable settlement.
- Share information with settlement stakeholders and gain their support for PROMPT's community engagement model.
- Secure funding investment for implementation of the model.
- Develop a flexible framework for measuring accountability for outcomes.

PROMPT recommends building equity and social stakes for immigrants in their host communities, while rejecting ineffective top-down approaches, whether dispersion strategies or an exclusive focus on settlement services or programs. Only a community engagement model can foster the sustainable settlement and regional development policy makers seek for smaller centres.

Source

<http://www.cassaonline.com/prompt/Library/Docs/Executive%20Summary%20of%20Smart%20Settlement.pdf>

**Putting Equity on the Agenda-ARE WE BEING HEARD?  
CASSA YORK REGION EQUITY SURVEY**

**EDUCATION IN YORK REGION**

1. Is the quality of education you or your (child)ren are receiving satisfactory?  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree

2. Do you feel that teachers and administrators treat all students with respect, regardless of their background?  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree

3. What changes to school policy, curriculum or teacher education do you suggest to improve your/your child's achievement in school? Do you have suggestions as to how the education system can improve itself to be more accessible and inclusive to newcomer and immigrant students?

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**SOCIAL SERVICE ACCESS IN YORK REGION**

4. How would you rate the quality of the service you have received if/when you have used local social services, such as healthcare, employment resources, family counselling, legal or financial services?  
A. Very helpful B. Helpful C. Sufficient D. Unhelpful E. Inadequate  
F. Never used any

5. Are the social services you want to use sufficiently advertising and conducting outreach to your community?  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree

6. How can social services be improved to serve newcomers and immigrants more effectively?

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**MUNICIPAL DECISION MAKING & ACCESS TO SPACE IN YORK REGION**

7. Do you feel the municipal decision making process is accessible and inclusive of your community?

A. Strongly Agree   B. Agree   C. Neutral   D. Disagree   E. Strongly Disagree

8. What challenges do you and members of your community face when trying to access or book public spaces, such as community and recreation centres?

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9. What more can your municipal government do to make you feel part of the community and the decision making process?

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**OPTIONAL PERSONAL INFORMATION:**

I. Please state whether or not you identify as a Visible Minority (Yes, No, Not Sure).

II. Please share your name and email address, if you wish.

III. Please share whether you live or work in York Region, or both.

***Thank you for sharing your thoughts!*** Surveys are also available online at [www.cassa.on.ca](http://www.cassa.on.ca).

Appendix C – Forum Agenda

Putting Equity on the Agenda – *ARE WE BEING HEARD?*  
A York Region Public Forum -May 9, 2009  
Bur Oak Secondary School  
933 Bur Oak Avenue  
Markham, Ontario

**Programme**

10am-11am Welcome, Introduction and Greetings

*Refreshments*

11am-12:30pm Concurrent Dialogue Sessions – discuss experiences, envision change and formulate recommendations to enhance equity within York Region.

*Session 1: Empowerment and Education*

*Session 2: Public Space & Civic Participation*

*Session 3: Serving the Community: Charity to Social Change*

12:30pm-1:30pm *Lunch*

1:30pm-3pm Concurrent Dialogue Sessions – discuss experiences, envision change and formulate recommendations to enhance equity within York Region.

*Session 4: Doing Youth Justice: Policing & Engagement*

*Session 5: Seniors as Agents of Change*

*Session 6: Gender Equity in York Region*

3pm-4pm Session Recommendations & Closing

*Refreshments*



**Council of Agencies  
Serving South Asians**

The Equity Forum on May 9, 2009 was supported by The Social Planning Council of York Region | Social Services Network of York Region | Chinese Canadian National Council | SPACE Coalition | Labour Education Centre | Blue Door Shelters | Markham Tamils Organization | Crescent Village Trust | Labour Community Services | Toronto & York Region Labour Council | Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care | York Federation of Students | Sandgate Women's Shelter | Family Services York Region | Punjabi Community Health Services | Metro Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic | African Canadian Legal Clinic | African Canadian Social Development Council | Canadian Arab Federation | Human Endeavour | South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

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