



MORE LESSONS LEARNED

**Welcoming Newcomer Families in
Family Resource Programs**

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This booklet supplements the *Welcome Here Resource Kit: Creating Welcoming Communities for Newcomer Families*
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
What makes new immigrant families feel welcome?	5
What are the challenges and needs of new immigrant families?	6
What are the challenges of practitioners who work with immigrant families?	7
What are the training needs of practitioners who work with immigrant families?	8
Welcome Plans for welcoming new immigrant families	9
Effective Practices: Creating welcoming communities	10
Conclusion	12
Appendix 1: Community Welcome Plans	13

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Executive Summary

Building on the *Welcome Here* Resource Kit developed in Phase 1 of the *Welcome Here* project, Phase 2 of the project focused on ways to create more welcoming family resource programs for immigrant families. Information was collected from practitioners and from immigrant families, using focus groups in three locations in different parts of the country, along with an online survey for FRP Canada members.

It is clear that many communities have significant newcomer populations, though the distribution of settlement is uneven across the country. Family resource programs are aware of the arrival of newcomer families in their communities and are attempting to serve their needs. Chief among the services that newcomer families tend to use in family resource programs are community information and referrals, parenting programs, child care information and referrals, and volunteer opportunities. When asked what makes them feel welcome in a community, newcomer families specifically mention a positive orientation to cultural diversity, including the attitude of staff members and a display of pictures of people from different origins. They also appreciate ready access to child care and programs related to gaining employment. Access to interpreters and to information published in their home language also makes them feel welcome.

This last point was mentioned as a potential obstacle to providing adequate services, both by families and by practitioners. All agreed that language and communication barriers create considerable challenges in providing the support that newcomer families need. Even when translation and interpretation services are available, these costs may be prohibitive for community organizations. Families also mentioned the obstacles they encounter discovering the ins and outs of official Canadian systems, obtaining suitable employment so they can provide for their families, obtaining affordable child care, and dealing with different expectations and practices related to child rearing. These challenges may leave families feeling overwhelmed and even depressed.

Practitioners are well aware of the challenges of meeting the needs of newcomer families. While the diversity of programming reported in the online survey indicates that organizations are doing their best to respond to the expressed needs of their participants, limited funding, space and staff surfaced often as obstacles to filling more gaps. Practitioners also keenly feel the lack of suitable documents to provide needed information in a clear and simple form, both in terms of documents written in plain English and documents translated into newcomers' languages. There is some suggestion that community partnerships with other organizations would provide a better continuum of services for newcomer families. Practitioners also identify a need for training in the areas of cross-cultural communication, awareness of issues faced by newcomers and the situation in countries newcomers have left.

As part of the focus group discussions, practitioners and families made specific suggestions for addressing the challenges they had identified, ranging from producing a "welcome kit" (to include a map marked with community services, instructions on accessing government services, etc.), to increasing intersectoral collaboration with the aim of sharing translation resources and reducing overlap, to holding community events to celebrate cultural diversity.

This report concludes with the consolidation of three welcome plans that were created as part of the focus group process. This process revealed that what immigrant families say they want corresponds to what practitioners also feel will create welcoming communities. Access to information, training and support services, translation services, mentorship programs and a physical environment that celebrates cultural diversity emerge as key components in creating a welcoming community.

Introduction

Phase 1 of the *Welcome Here* project documented many effective practices and produced a *Welcome Here* resource kit for use in family resource centers and settlement agencies. The kit includes a report on the lessons learned about collaborations between family resource centres and settlement agencies. Phase 2 of the project built on these resources, using an online member survey and focus groups to collect, identify and consolidate information about how to create more welcoming family resource programs for immigrant families.

Focus groups with practitioners and immigrant parents

Between September and December 2008, six focus groups were held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; North Vancouver, British Columbia; and Ottawa, Ontario. In each community, one focus group was held with immigrant parents and one with practitioners who work with immigrant families.

Charlottetown: CHANCES Family Centre specializes in providing family programs to the community. CHANCES provides drop-in programs, child care, parenting programs, pre-natal programs, home visiting and junior kindergarten. The *Welcome Here* team worked in collaboration with the CHANCES Family Centre and conducted two focus groups, one with immigrant families (14 participants) and one with practitioners who work with immigrant families (15 participants).

North Vancouver: North Shore Neighbourhood House provides a range of services for the community, including activities which strengthen and celebrate multicultural connections and partnerships with other agencies to provide workshops, recreational programs, language training and parenting programs to immigrant families. The *Welcome Here* project team worked in collaboration with the North Shore Neighbourhood House in North Vancouver to conduct two focus groups: one with immigrant parents (25 participants) and the other with practitioners working with immigrant families (23 participants).

Ottawa: Immigrant Women Services specializes in providing crisis intervention, individual and group counselling, services for children who witness violence, information and referral services, employment services and language and interpretation services. Because of these ties with immigrant families, the *Welcome Here* team worked in close collaboration with Immigrant Women Services in Ottawa to conduct two focus groups, one with immigrant parents (12 participants) and the other with practitioners working with immigrant families (19 participants).

Using a combination of techniques, such as questionnaires, group activities and open discussions, facilitators created an open and safe space for an exchange around three main themes: feelings, building community relationships, and program and training needs.

Member survey

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) conducted an on-line member survey for the purposes of gathering input on current practices concerning services to immigrant and refugee families and to gather information about practitioners' resource and training needs. The survey was set up using online software, and the link was sent to all FRP Canada member organizations in November 2008. The survey was made up of multiple choice questions, with the option of adding comments, feedback and suggestions. Care was taken to maintain anonymity of the respondents, to solicit open feedback. The survey was completed by 104 member organizations.

Approximately 58% of the respondents to FRP Canada's member survey said that many immigrant/refugee

families have settled in their community in the last ten years. One in five said that over three-quarters of the families visiting their program were either immigrants or refugees who have arrived in the last decade. By contrast, almost a third of the respondents answered that fewer than 10% of their participants were in this category. This reflects the fact that immigration is concentrated in certain communities, and not distributed evenly across the country.

Survey respondents reported serving immigrant and refugee families who speak a wide variety of languages. One centre noted that clients of its umbrella organization speak over 100 different languages. The five languages (besides English and French) that were most frequently reported by survey respondents are Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi (Persian) and Punjabi.

Based on the responses from the member survey, it is evident that immigration to Canada is happening in both large and small communities across Canada. Community-based organizations, including family resource programs, are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of new immigrant families and providing programs and services that assist with the successful integration of newcomers into Canadian communities.

This consolidated report summarizes the lessons learned from the Phase 2 focus groups and where applicable, incorporates similar findings or responses from the member survey. Interestingly, both the member survey and the focus groups indicate that what immigrant families say that would make them feel welcome corresponds to what practitioners also feel will create welcoming communities.

"If you feel happy inside you can face the challenges outside. It is important for the family to work as a team and to support each other as they make changes to their lives in Canada."

*Participant
Ottawa parent focus group*

What makes new immigrant families feel welcome?

Participants in the focus groups for new immigrant families identified the following “signs” that made them feel welcome in the community:

Access to childcare and children’s programs

- the availability of occasional childcare, home day care, childcare subsidies and well baby visits
- the children’s recreational areas are comfortable and teachers are careful to show concern about children’s welfare
- the facilities for programs are well designed

Access to interpretation, translation and language programs

- having access to interpreters for families who are in the initial stages of settling into the community
- providing language tutoring as required
- displaying signs in language of origin

Programs and services

- providing access to pre-employment workshops
- providing affordable programs and services
- the centre is clean and attractive with welcome signs (cup of tea, a poster showing the celebration of an event)
- the centre displays pictures of families and art forms from various cultures
- the front-line staff are welcoming and professional
- the staff members have a positive attitude

The member survey asked respondents to identify the programs and services that are most frequently accessed by new immigrant and refugee families. The most common programs and services accessed were community information and referral, parenting programs, childcare services and referrals and volunteer opportunities. In addition to identifying programs and services that were listed as part of the member survey, respondents listed programs that were created in response to the needs of new immigrant and refugee families, for instance, a Muslims’ women’s swim group, theatre for youth, community gatherings and potlucks. It is interesting to note the correlation between the responses of what makes immigrant families feel welcome and the types of programs and services that are being offered to new immigrant and refugee families at family resource centres.

What are the challenges and needs of new immigrant families?

Participants in the focus groups for new immigrant families identified the following challenges and needs related to being a new immigrant family in the community:

Availability and cost of childcare

- childcare costs can be higher than the wages that a family earns
- there are not enough subsidized spaces in childcare for low-income families

Difficulty understanding the needs of young children

- families find it difficult to cope with the fact that the rules at school are different from the rules at home
- the transition into Canadian school is difficult for children of new immigrant families
- raising children in Canada is very different from other parts of the world

Feelings of being overwhelmed

- families did not realize how complicated the process of immigration was
- families reported feeling overwhelmed and sometimes depressed
- families focused on finding employment and trying to understand how the society functions

Lack of access to information

- families are not aware of what services and programs exist in the community
- there is a lack of information about applying for a social insurance number, a bank account, banking rules, education systems

Lack of a clear guide for newcomer families

- families expressed a need for a road map which would assist in finding the correct information and a guide to explain the steps to making a successful transition into Canada

Lack of extended family support

- many families expressed feelings of being overwhelmed since they do not have access to the support system of their extended family

Language and communication barriers

- families felt it was difficult to be involved in volunteer opportunities because their English communication skills were not strong
- families do not have access to interpreters as required
- a family's questions are not always answered in a clear manner

Securing employment and uncertainty about the future

- families are not able to find a job in their field
- there are feelings of frustration at not being able to provide for their families
- newcomers' previous employment status or qualifications are not recognized in Canada

What are the challenges of practitioners who work with immigrant families?

The challenges in working with immigrant families were similar for both the member survey respondents and the practitioners who participated in the focus groups:

Accessing interpretation and translation services

- communication barriers prevent practitioners from reaching immigrant families
- practitioners expressed a need to have more translated materials and resources
- the high cost for translation services is a barrier to their use

Inability to provide services on weekends

- practitioners feel there is a need for programs and services on the weekends, but funding and lack of staffing are barriers

Inability to reach new immigrant families

- practitioners identified that they did not feel that they were reaching all the new immigrant families with young children in their community

Lack of community partnerships

- other community organizations, such as settlement agencies, are not aware of services and programs offered by family resource programs
- mechanisms need to be created to help provide a continuum of services to newcomer families
- family resource program practitioners are not aware of all the services and programs for immigrant families that exist in the community

- due to lack of appropriate community partnerships, organizations may not be able to refer a family to other services that provide programs in the family's language of origin

Lack of information

- practitioners feel there is a lack of information about relevant local, provincial and federal legislation to help when seeking funding for programs and services directed at newcomers

Lack of simple resources

- many resources exist, but there is a need for a simple resource that presents services in the community in a holistic way, such as a welcome pack for newcomers

Lack of space and funding

- lack of funding prohibits organizations from creating additional programs specific to newcomer families
- there are shortages of staff and space because of lack of funding

It is interesting to note the correlation between the responses of the challenges for immigrant families and the challenges for practitioners working with immigrant families. Lack of access to information, clear and simple resources, space and language and communication barriers are all shared challenges.

What are the training needs of practitioners who work with immigrant families?

Many respondents to the member survey (45%) said that they feel their staff members are adequately trained to work with immigrant and refugee families. A smaller percentage (28%) felt unsure about the adequacy of staff training in this regard, and 26% said that staff training is inadequate. Survey respondents and practitioners who attended the focus groups gave similar answers when asked about their training needs:

Training needs of practitioners

- orientation training for new staff members since they are not always trained to deal with newcomer families
- training about how to behave with newcomer families; what is perceived as "proper" often depends on the culture from which they come
- training in awareness of barriers or challenges new immigrant families face

"We need to learn about other cultures – not only for them to learn about our culture – we all need to share the world in a mutually supportive way."

Participant -Charlottetown parents' focus group

"There is a fundamental disconnect between the needs of immigrant communities and what the mainstream communities would like us to do ... cultures' traditional norms may not be the same and do not need to be westernized"

Participant -Charlottetown parents' focus group

- training in awareness of specific issues in the home countries of newcomer families
- training in cross-cultural communication, counselling, dealing with post-traumatic stress, discrimination and racism
- training to help families plan their lives in Canada to achieve stability faster

The expressed training needs for practitioners that work in family resource programs are in response to working with a diverse community. Community-based organizations that are moving towards cultural competency provide a variety of multicultural training that is responsive to the training needs of staff, volunteers and board of director members.

Welcome Plans for welcoming new immigrant families

As part of the focus group process, the parents from immigrant families and the practitioners who work with immigrant families were asked to create a welcome plan. Interestingly, this process revealed that what immigrant families say they want corresponds to what practitioners also feel will create welcoming communities. The following points are a consolidation of all three welcome plans:

Access to information

- develop a community newsletter
- create a map which shows the location of all community services including housing, food, language training, health care, employment, recreation, spiritual centres, places of worship
- create a list/book of all available community resources, clubs and services

Education, training and support services

- provide affordable services, such as English classes and childcare
- create partnerships with other service providers and create a way to prevent overlap of services
- provide parenting workshops and guidance, such as Canadian life skills
- provide training to staff, such as how to work with multicultural groups
- offer a variety of programs for family members of all ages

Interpretation and translation

- collaborate with other community organizations that offer translation and interpretation services in an effort to avoid overlap and duplication of services
- provide access to information in people's own language
- translate more resources about childcare, subsidies, taxes, medical system, holidays

Mentorship and host programs

- have mentorship opportunities for families with similar backgrounds as regards culture or profession
- initiate a personal welcome
- provide mentoring for caregivers (grandparents and parents)
- provide opportunities for volunteering in a systematic and professional way

Welcoming spaces and cultural diversity

- create opportunities to celebrate and observe cultural diversity
- create welcoming spaces which cater to multi-generational, family oriented activities
- ensure that components of a family resource program “touch” immigrant families personally/culturally

The detailed welcome plans from each participating community are included in Appendix 1 of this report.

Effective Practices: Creating welcoming communities

As part of the focus group discussion, practitioners shared many effective practices and experiences. The following are examples of effective practices used by various community practitioners to help immigrant families feel welcome.

Welcoming programming and services

- create a list of celebrations from a variety of cultures and celebrate
- create a way to follow-up with newcomer families, for example a monthly drop-in program, e-mail
- create an evaluation form or get oral feedback about how your program can be more successful
- create opportunities for activities from various cultures, such as art, dancing, poetry, that bring newcomer families and Canadian families together
- expand programming to include an evening for grandparents, extended family members or siblings
- consider using volunteers to support childcare needs during other programming
- consider organizing a pot luck meal where families share a dish from their home country

Welcoming spaces and physical environment

- display a map of the world in the family resource centre to show where families

come from, display pictures that are representative of the families in the community

- display artwork, symbols, books, pictures that represent the families' backgrounds
- host an open house which would be a "global village" to showcase the various cultures in the community
- create a welcoming space using bright colours, framed children's art work, postcards, a globe

Staffing considerations

- offer cultural sensitivity training as part of staff orientation
- recruit volunteers and staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds

Gather information and resources

- attend programs that bridge cultures and workshops to facilitate intercultural understanding
- become familiar with other services in the community so that newcomers can be referred appropriately
- create a list of translation and interpretation resources; some are available online
- recruit volunteers to train as interpreters
- create a space within the organization to display flyers and information about other programs and services in the community
- make a list of affordable places where newcomers can shop and where they can go for family activities

Welcoming communities and community partnerships

- ask other agencies how services from family resource programs can be integrated into existing community programs
- create partnerships with settlement agencies to expand the knowledge of resources that are available for newcomer families
- participate in cross-agency fairs as an opportunity to network with other services and to display family resource programs and services
- download the fillable PDF Welcome Brochure that has customizable titles and is available in 10 languages at www.welcomehere.ca - follow the quick link for the *Welcome Here Resource Kit*

The list of effective practices demonstrates the ability of family resource programs to continue to be responsive to the needs of the community it serves. Many of these practices support the guiding principles

of family support as the practices are participatory in nature and build upon the family's cultural identity and its strengths with equality and mutual respect. Through continued community collaboration and responsive programming, family resource programs can help support the successful integration of new immigrant families into the community.

Conclusion

The results from both the focus groups and member survey provide valuable information for practitioners working with new immigrant families within the field of family support. This information can be used for programming purposes or as a means to create solutions to overcome the identified barriers and challenges.

Immigrant families feel welcomed into the community when they have access to childcare programs, employment services, translation and educational training programs. The challenges and barriers for both immigrant families and practitioners include lack of access to information, lack of training, lack of community partnerships and employment barriers such as lack of recognition of credentials, and feelings of isolation. It is hoped that through the identification of the barriers and the process of community collaboration and partnerships, these barriers can be removed. The individual welcome plans that were developed as part of the focus group process provided an opportunity for both immigrant families and practitioners to create a road map to overcome the identified barriers and to provide a path towards inclusive and welcoming communities.

Although there is much work to be done towards creating welcoming communities, it is evident that family resource programs are doing their best to respond to the needs for immigrant families through the provision of diverse programs and services that are both reflective and responsive of the communities they serve. Family resource programs continue to build upon the strengths of the families and create welcoming spaces where families have the opportunity to provide mutual support to one another and to actively participate in community life.

Appendix 1: Community Welcome Plans

Welcome Plan

North Shore Neighbourhood House

Vancouver, BC

“Welcome everyone, not just immigrants” -participant of North Vancouver focus group

Access to information

- assemble a “Welcome Pack”-a notebook with all the information that newcomers would need to reach a happy life in Canada; getting a social insurance number, driver’s license, health card, opening a bank account, weather, using items such as a heaters and furnaces, education systems, recreational activities, transportation systems, Canadian law affecting immigrants, social norms, slang, parenting and language problems
- create a map of the area indicating services available in the community such as clinics, hospitals, places of worship, schools and school boards, recreational activities, parenting and language programs

interpretation and translation

- provide access to information in people’s own language
- translate more resources on childcare, subsidies and recreational activities for children in other languages

Access to education, training and support services

- initiate a cross-sectoral and collaborative effort, which would include businesses and social services, to build inclusive communities
- organize activities and workshops for newcomers, such as groups to meet regularly to discuss and solve problems
- provide affordable English classes that prepare immigrants for work at a higher English level
- provide access to affordable childcare and easier access to upgrade education
- provide financial support to immigrants to learn English, for grocery subsidies, dental care, etc.
- educate the Canadian public about immigrants and immigrant issues through various media
- bring agencies together to create mechanisms for agency collaboration and to avoid overlap of services

Mentorship, volunteering and host programs

- provide mentorship for caregivers (grandparents and parents)
- seek grants to fund community events such as block parties
- match newcomer families with local families to help with language and culture and to establish friendships
- initiate a “personal welcome” where individuals take a personal responsibility to welcome immigrants

Welcome Plan

CHANCES Family Centre

Charlottetown, PEI

“Create welcoming spaces which cater to multi-generational and family oriented activities” -participant of Charlottetown focus group

Access to information

- have a Welcome Centre with centralized services for housing, language assessment and training, parenting education
- provide individualized packages of information for individual families
- have a list of all available community resources and a guide to help immigrant families and practitioners to have easy access to community services, resources and organizations.
- produce a community newsletter to keep everyone informed of what is going on in the community
- create information sharing clubs

Interpretation and translation

- coordinate community services related to language to avoid overlap
- establish an organization to act as a medium to broadcast community activities such as jobs, information and news in various languages
- translate documents in various languages such as information about holidays, medical systems, taxes, culture

Access to education, training and support services

- create more spaces for ESL and EAL classes
- have after-school homework clubs for all ages
- have parenting workshops and guidance
- provide cultural sensitivity workshops, programs for immigrant families, practitioners and residents of the community
- provide daycare and access to recreational activities; school aged and preschool children have the same opportunities
- have low-cost recreational programs for families such as sports, art programs and activities for social interaction

Welcoming spaces and cultural diversity

- have welcoming spaces which cater to multi-generational family orientated activities
- create opportunities to celebrate and observe cultural diversity and sharing

such as Christmas parties, cultural evenings, “global village” at special events in the community

Mentorship, volunteering and host programs

- have mentorship opportunities for families with similar backgrounds in culture
- create opportunities for volunteering in the community organized in a systematic and professional way
- increase opportunities with a Host Program such as pairing newcomers families with local families to help with language and cultural adaptation as well as to establish new friendships

Welcome Plan

Immigrant Women Services

Ottawa, ON

“Ensure that there are components of your program that “touch” immigrant families personally and culturally” -participant from Ottawa focus group

Access to information

- have an information centre at the airport for new immigrants
- have a mandatory orientation session for new immigrant families. This session could be done within the first two weeks of arriving in Canada. Information includes: health care information, how to obtain social insurance number, banking information, housing, childcare, childcare subsidies, community connections within your own community, how to get the best deals for your budget
- promote services available to newcomer families through multi cultural liaison officers, local doctor offices, health care centers, schools, clinics

Access to education, training and support services

- have a point of contact such as a Family Centre based on the region in the city
- create partnerships with other service providers within the community to encourage partnerships with immigrant families through volunteering
- provide training to equip staff to deal with multi cultural groups and ensure that services are accessible
- create a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” around family life, child abuse, partner abuse, culturally accepted norms, how to be assertive, asking for what you would want and understanding individual rights
- have a combination of programs for children and parents of children aged 6-12 years old; there could be both combined programs for boys and girls as well as individual programs to serve the needs and interest of boys and girls separately

Welcome spaces and cultural diversity

- ensure that there are components of your program that “touch” immigrant families personally/culturally

This publication, along with other resources, can be found on FRP Canada's web site
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