



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Grande Prairie, Alberta

This community report is part of the "Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC's Western Region" study.

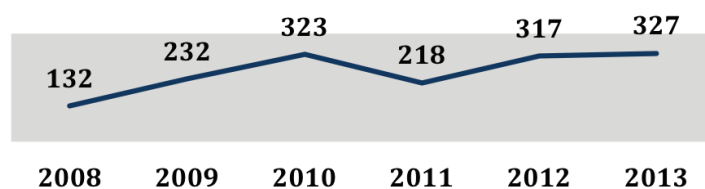


Population (2011): 55,032 residents.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census

Permanent Resident Landings Grand Prairie 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Data sources: 5 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) receiving funding from CIC, Provincial and other sources.

• Findings validated locally

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

Grande Prairie has a well-developed settlement service sector with all possible services listed (appendix A) offered by the participant organization or someone in the community.



Key gaps identified

- Inadequate language assessment and training
- Affordable child care
- Legal services referral
- Welcoming services
- Lack of funding at community SPOs
- All services need to expand



Barriers to access services

- English language proficiency
- Lack of child care
- Ineligibility for services among some newcomers
- Lack of awareness of services offered
- Transportation difficulties
- SPO hours of operations (for local shift workers)



Top services needed

- Help finding employment/credential assessment
- Improved language training and translation
- Welcoming services
- Assistance finding housing



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Assistance finding housing, health and employment supports, legal support, interpretation, language training and transportation.

PARTNERSHIPS



Grande Prairie has a very well developed and diverse service provider partnership network. The most commonly identified partnerships exist with schools and school boards, housing services, municipal offices, health services, police force, religious organizations, labour market services and the Chamber of Commerce. The municipality is seen as playing a key role in coordination of services.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



The majority of the study participants felt that it is somewhat difficult for newcomers to settle in Grande Prairie, mainly because of issues related to access to housing, inadequate available language training and access to transportation. On the other hand, labour market access is good, mainly because of opportunities in the oil and gas industry.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Grand Prairie, Alberta

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to better understand the settlement and integration services available to newcomers and to explore the service gaps and opportunities in Grande Prairie, Alberta and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Grande Prairie by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Grande Prairie. Data was collected in October and November 2014 from five organizations that serve newcomers in Grande Prairie through a telephone survey completed by a representative from each organization. Two of the five organizations sampled received funding from CIC and the other organizations relied on the provincial and municipal governments for funding, in addition to other funding sources. Three survey respondents participated in a feedback session on the primary survey findings via teleconference held in November 2014.

Background

Grande Prairie is a growing city in northwestern Alberta, approximately 450 kilometers northwest of Edmonton. The city's economic growth is derived mainly from the oil and gas sector and agricultural industries. Grande Prairie reported a population of 55,032 residents in 2011 and has grown 4.95% since 2001. Grande Prairie is a young and prosperous community with an average age of 30.3 years and an average annual household income of \$126,877.

Community Settlement Concerns

All the service provider representatives felt that the number of newcomers settling in Grande Prairie had increased in the last five years. This growth has been driven primarily by labour demand in the oil and gas sector. Participants' opinions related to the ease of the settlement experience in Grande Prairie was mixed, with two participants reporting that it was somewhat easy and three participants reporting that it was difficult or somewhat difficult for newcomers to settle. Four of the five participants reported that it was somewhat easy, easy or very easy for newcomers to get jobs, with only

one person reporting that it was somewhat difficult.

In the follow-up consultation study participants noted a lack of proximity to major urban centres, a severe lack of housing, and language competencies as impediments to newcomer integration in the community. Service providers made note of a lack of funding for ESL programs, particularly in the workplace. Participants felt that credential recognition was a key concern, as many available jobs do not match well with newcomers' education and training. It was suggested that the guidelines for credential recognition should be communicated clearly to prospective migrants prior to entry in Canada. English language skills were seen as a determining factor in influencing newcomer success in employment, since those with better language proficiency can more easily upgrade their education and job skills. For example, these language skills are a pre-requisite for testing for the various safety tickets required for oil and gas jobs that equate into higher wages for workers.

It was suggested that more funds could be allotted to providing more and better quality information to newcomers about the settlement services available in Grande Prairie.

Available Settlement Services

Grande Prairie has a well-developed settlement and integration service sector with all services listed (27 key services – see appendix A) offered by the participant organization or someone in the community. All services listed were identified as requiring expansion in Grande Prairie, with language assessment, more accessible language training (i.e. online/alternative delivery of the ESL classes), and flexible childcare to accommodate shift work identified as being in most need of expansion. The services that were identified as being most needed by newcomers were language assessment and interpretation, transportation, adequate housing, and help finding employment.

In regards to newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services, participants indicated that temporary foreign workers (TFW), new and returning naturalized citizens, refugee claimants and international students were all in need of settlement services. Participants did not indicate

that one ineligible newcomer group was more in need than another. Housing, health and employment supports, legal support (especially for TFWs), translation, language training and transportation were all listed as the services most needed by Grande Prairie newcomers who were ineligible for services.

Tracking and Planning

Two of the five participating service providers report that their organization is guided by a strategic plan and independent assessment of service needs among newcomers on an annual basis. Other participants engage in more informal assessment of settlement needs. Surveys and questionnaires are common tools used by service providers in this assessment process.

Specific Capacities

In Grande Prairie, the organizations that participated in the survey had strong organizational capacity. However, four out of the five organizations felt that they did not have enough financial support from government sources to maintain their current level of service. Service providers were unanimous in their opinion that they did not have enough funding from funding sources external to governments. Limited staff capacity was cited as an issue that led to shortcomings in meeting clients' needs. This is especially true during the assessment stage that engages newcomers early on in their settlement process. Funding to develop projects to advocate for work training opportunities in the workplaces, promote workplace cultural competency training, and to educate the population on the different challenges faced by immigrants was identified as needed. All participants in the sample felt that their staff had the skills and experience to provide services. However, only three out of the five organizations identified that they were able to deliver services in both official languages. It was the general opinion of participants that more capacity will be needed in the future to meet client needs, including the hiring and training of staff.

Partnerships

All service provider participants in this sample reported being engaged in some form of partnership with other community organizations, and it is evident that Grande Prairie has developed an effective service provider partnership network. Participants indicated that partnerships exist within all 21 community partners listed in the survey (see appendix B). Four out of five participants reported partnerships with the following organizations:

schools/school boards, umbrella organizations, other service providers, language training centers, the chamber of commerce, housing services, municipal offices, health services, and public libraries. In addition, a partnership with the YMCA provided temporary housing for newcomers.

There were 24 possible partnerships that were identified as needed by the 5 participants, which indicates room for growth in partnership in Grande Prairie. The activities conducted in partnership were categorized into three groups; settlement (e.g., getting jobs and housing, daily functioning), integration (e.g., teaching labour rules and human rights), and welcoming (e.g., orientation to community, civic events). Participants reported offering integration, settlement, and welcoming services in partnership with others.

Creating an integrated document indicating all available services to newcomers was suggested. Partnerships with businesses and employers are seen as very important and have been developed through the chamber of commerce. The municipality is seen as playing a key role in coordination of services. Given the number of current partnerships and interest in future partnership development in Grande Prairie, this community would be a candidate for a LIP.

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Appendix A – List of Possible Services

SETTLEMENT

- Greeting upon arrival/initial reception
- Information and orientation
- Needs assessment and referral
- Interpretation services
- Language assessment
- Language training
- Help finding housing
- Help with daily life (e.g., registering for school, getting a bank account)
- Transportation support

ECONOMIC

- Help finding a job
- Educational upgrading
- Recognition of foreign credentials
- Investment opportunities
- Job-specific language training
- Help setting up a business
- Occupational/business mentorship and networking
- Financial supports

SOCIAL

- Childcare
- Cultural Events
- Recreational services
- Legal support/referral
- Health Services
- Mental Health Services
- Social inclusion/ integration support
- Services for seniors
- Services for women
- Services for youth

Appendix B – Possible Organizational Partnerships

1. School/School Boards
2. Umbrella organizations
3. Newcomers (individuals)
4. Housing services
5. Settlement service providers
6. Health services
7. Municipal offices/ EDO
8. Civil society groups
9. Francophone organizations
10. Language training providers
11. Children/Family services
12. Businesses
13. Chambers of Commerce
14. Police Force
15. Universities/Research Networks
16. Ethno-cultural groups
17. Religious organizations
18. Public libraries
19. Foundations
20. Labour Market Services
21. Other: Workplace Revolution; The Centre for Newcomers