



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Lethbridge, Alberta

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

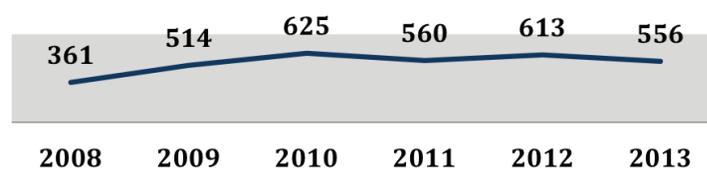


Population (2014): 93,004 residents.

Source: City of Lethbridge Municipal Census, 2014

Permanent Resident Landings Lethbridge 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Data sources: 4 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs)

receiving funding from CIC, Provincial, NGO, other federal, and various other sources.

- Findings validated locally

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

Lethbridge has a well-developed settlement service sector with 27 services (out of 27 possible key services listed in appendix A) offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community.



Key gaps identified

- Health and mental health services
- Affordable high-level language training
- Job-specific language training
- Affordable childcare
- Translation services
- Services for youth



Barriers to access services

- English language proficiency
- Financial difficulties of newcomers
- Ineligibility for services
- Low health and English language literacies, especially among refugees



Top services needed

- Health and mental health care
- Interpreters and translators
- Affordable childcare
- A local CIC facility
- Special needs and adaptation services



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Language assessment and training, social inclusion and integration supports, health and mental health care services, information and orientation, help with daily life, occupational and business mentorship, and employment services.

PARTNERSHIPS



Lethbridge has a well-developed and diverse service provider partnership network. The most commonly identified partnerships exist with school and school boards, umbrella organizations, health services, Francophone organizations, language training providers, children and family services, police force, universities and research networks, ethno-cultural groups, businesses, and the public library. Desired partnerships include the Chamber of Commerce, foundations, and labour market services.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



Although there is no general consensus among service providers in Lethbridge about the level of difficulties newcomers face in integrating in the community, English language proficiency and foreign credential recognition were identified as the primary barriers to gaining employment. A lack of cultural understanding between newcomers and the host society was also identified as an impediment to integration.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Lethbridge, 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 Lethbridge, Alberta and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Lethbridge by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Lethbridge. Data was collected in October and November 2014 from organizations that serve newcomers in Lethbridge through a telephone survey completed by a representative from each organization. All organizations receive provincial funding, two receive funding from CIC, one receives other federal funding, one receives private funding, and one receives funding from NGOs. In addition, two organizations receive funding from other sources. Four survey respondents participated in a feedback session on the primary survey findings via teleconference held in December 2014.

Background

As the largest city in southern Alberta, Lethbridge is the industrial and commercial hub of the region. It is the fourth-largest city in Alberta and is home to a growing population. Much of the city's population is employed in the service or public sector. Lethbridge has a university and two colleges, which meet the educational needs of the community. The city is home to a number of international students, permanent residents, and temporary foreign workers (TFW). Many TFWs are employed in the food processing industry.

Community Settlement Concerns

All participants felt that the number of newcomers settling in Lethbridge has increased over the past five years. They attribute this growth to arrivals of temporary foreign workers (TFWs), and a sizeable number of refugees. Of note, as indicated during follow-up consultation with service providers, Lethbridge is home to the largest Bhutanese community in Canada, roughly 1,000 individuals, and has become a popular destination for primary and secondary migrants from

that country. Refugees and other newcomers are attracted to Lethbridge's easily accessible settlement and employment services, and an attractive labour market. The immigration category of newcomers certainly influences the settlement experience in Lethbridge, with refugees facing more pronounced challenges related to language proficiency and access to health care.

Despite the accessibility of settlement services in the small city newcomers face a number of settlement challenges. Service providers noted during the follow-up consultation that there was good access to language assessment and training; however, access to more expensive higher level (post-secondary standard) language training was viewed as largely unaffordable for many newcomers. They also noted that the absence of a CIC office was seen as challenge in providing services to newcomers in Lethbridge. Newcomers may be able to locate services, but they do not necessarily receive quick access to the supports they require which leads to frustrations with long wait times.

Furthermore, although employment services in the city experience a remarkable level of success (95% of those who use the service find employment as indicated during the follow-up consultation), as in other Canadian labour markets some newcomers find it difficult to find a job due to problems with foreign qualification assessment and recognition. Language and transportation were also cited as barriers to finding employment.

Available Settlement Services

Lethbridge has a well-developed settlement and integration service sector with 27 services (out of 27 key services listed in appendix A) offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community. Participants feel that a number of services need to be expanded. These include language training, recreational services, health and mental health care services, social inclusion and integration support, and services for youth. Out of those services not currently offered to newcomers, participants feel that employment specific services such as investment opportunities, job-specific language training, and help setting up a business are most needed. Service providers in Lethbridge offer many supports and resources, but there is room for expansion.

All participants indicated that they provide services to at least one group of newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services. Ineligible groups include temporary foreign workers, new and returning naturalized Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, and international students. The top services most needed by ineligible groups include employment services, language training and supports, help with daily life, information and orientation, health and mental health care services, and social inclusion and integration supports.

As indicated during the follow-up consultation, service providers noted that TFWs in particular face considerable confusion and anxiety over changes to the existing TFW program by the federal government.

Service providers in Lethbridge identified several issues as impediments to successful integration including language and financial difficulties, ineligibility, discrimination and a lack of understanding between citizens and newcomers, confusion about where to get help, and difficulties with health literacy. Another shared concern among SPOs cited during the follow-up was based on a shortage of doctors and translators in the community and the inter-related difficulties faced by newcomers as they attempted to access health and mental health services.

Tracking and Planning

All participating service providers report that their organization is guided by a strategic plan that has been developed within their organization or with other service providers. SPOs regularly, either independently or jointly with other service providers, assess the service needs of the newcomers in their community. These needs assessments took a variety of forms such as teacher observations, student evaluations, feedback from the community, and through settlement practitioner and client narratives. Needs assessment processes are completed on an on-going basis and often four times a year for most organizations.

Specific Capacities

In Lethbridge, the organizations that participated in the survey had strong organizational capacity. Most organizations seem to have adequate capacities in staff skills, communication, reporting, and coordination to maintain current services. However, there is a desire to increase capacity in financial support to maintain current services from government sources, communicating and coordinating with stakeholders, mobilizing community support and welcome newcomers, and creating a governing and strategic plan. Overall, there is a split amongst participants regarding the extent to which they feel current capacity within their organization is adequate to serve the newcomers arriving to their community.

Partnerships

All service provider participants report that they are engaged in partnership with other community organizations. Participants indicated that they were in partnership with all community partners listed in the survey (see appendix B). The most commonly reported partners include schools and school boards, umbrella organizations, newcomers, settlement service providers, health services, civil society groups, Francophone organizations, language training providers, children and family services, police force, universities and research networks, ethno-cultural groups, businesses and public libraries. There is a desire to partner with the Chamber of Commerce, foundations, and labour market services.

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). In Lethbridge, integration and welcoming activities were more likely to be conducted in partnership than settlement services. Given the level of partnering and number of partnerships that currently exists in Lethbridge, this community would be a candidate for a LIP.

Research Team

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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: Flexibility Learning