



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Squamish & Whistler, British Columbia

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

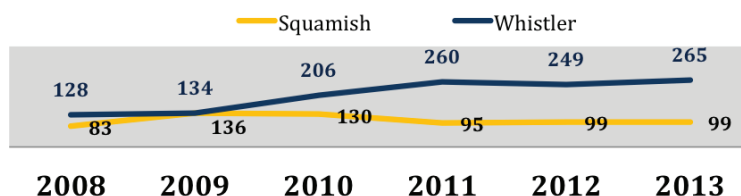


Population (2011): 17,479 residents in Squamish and 9,824 in Whistler.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census

Permanent Resident Landings Squamish & Whistler 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Data sources: 6 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) receiving funding from CIC, Provincial, NGO, other federal, municipal, and various other sources.

• Findings validated locally

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

- Most of the listed services are available to some extent in Squamish and Whistler.



Key gaps identified

- Lack of awareness regarding services
- Childcare, language assessment, interpretation services, and job-specific language training
- Foreign credential recognition
- Most services need to expand
- Lack of adequate organizational capacities for SPOs.



Barriers to access services

- Language barriers
- Program eligibility restrictions
- Geographically dispersed nature of the two communities
- Lack of public transportation
- Frequent changes in the location of offered services



Top services needed

Information and orientation, language training, integration support, assistance finding a job and with daily life.



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Information and orientation, integration supports, needs assessment and referral, childcare, assistance finding a job and with daily life and legal support.

PARTNERSHIPS



Partnerships identified with most of the listed partners. Welcoming, settlement, and integration activities are all conducted in partnership.

Participants reported a desire for a partnership with Chambers of Commerce and local businesses, who sponsor large numbers of newcomers but take little responsibility for their settlement.

There is a need for greater collaboration among SPOs and creation of a LIP.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



- Perceptions vary regarding how easy or difficult it is for newcomers to settle in Squamish and Whistler. Very high cost of living (including housing), lack of social connections, low visibility of services, and confusion about where to get help are the main barriers to successful settlement.
- Perception: It is "somewhat difficult" to access employment in the communities, with the main barriers being language, lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, and lack of living wage employment.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Squamish & Whistler, British Columbia

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 Squamish and Whistler, British Columbia and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Squamish and Whistler by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Squamish and Whistler. Data was collected in October 2014 from 3 organizations that serve newcomers in Squamish and Whistler through a telephone survey completed by a representative from each organization. Three participants receive both CIC and provincial funding, and 1 of these also receives funding from Vancouver Coastal Health. Of the 3 that do not receive CIC funding, all receive provincial and other federal funding. Additionally, 2 receive municipal funding and 1 receives funding from a nearby university. Five survey respondents attended a focus group to provide feedback on the preliminary survey findings contained in a draft report.

Background

Squamish is located approximately 60km north of Vancouver and Whistler is located 120km north of Vancouver on the Sea to Sky Highway. In 2011, the population of the Squamish census agglomeration was 17,479, an increase of 14.6% from 2006. In 2011, Whistler (District Municipality) had a population of 9,824, a 6.2% increase from 2006. CIC figures indicate that from 2008-2013, 642 Permanent Residents (PRs) arrived to Squamish, and 1,242 to Whistler.

Community Settlement Concerns

Five respondents believe that the number of newcomers to their area has increased in the last 5 years due to a combination of expansion of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program, increased economic activity, and the lasting effects of the 2010 Winter Olympics being held at Whistler.

ACCESSING SETTLEMENT SERVICES

When asked for their perception of how easy it is to settle in their community, 3 respondents replied that it is "somewhat difficult," while 3 indicated that it is "somewhat easy." A recently developed partnership between the Welcome Centre and the public library was thought to be a positive influence, while language barriers, the geographically dispersed nature of the two communities, lack of transportation, and frequent changes in the location of services were reported to hinder settlement. The barriers that make it most difficult for newcomers to settle successfully are the very high cost of living (including housing), lack of social connections, low visibility of services, and confusion about where to get help. Further, 5 respondents agreed that over 25% of all newcomers find it difficult to locate the services they need. Respondents were almost unanimous that all of the concerns listed in Appendix A have been raised in their community.

GETTING JOBS

Five respondents reported that it is "somewhat difficult" for newcomers to access employment opportunities, with the main barriers being language and lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience. In the feedback session, participants explained that the problem is not so much lack of jobs (many newcomers have 3-4 jobs) as the nature of the work that is available. Although newcomers are often highly skilled, most available jobs are low skill, part time, and temporary, with few opportunities for advancement. This leads to high turnover and the continual arrival of new workers who need support to integrate successfully in the community.

Available Settlement Services

CURRENT SERVICE PROVIDER CAPACITY

Although not all respondents provided information regarding the number of newcomers served, based on the responses provided, PRs comprise the largest proportion of service users.

INVENTORY OF SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Respondents reported that all of the services listed in Appendix B are available to some extent, although there was an overall lack of awareness regarding services offered

by other SPOs. At least 4 respondents provide: services for women, services for seniors, social inclusion/integration support, cultural events, assistance with daily life, greeting upon arrival, information and orientation, and language training. However, childcare, language assessment, interpretation services, and job-specific language training are offered by 1 respondent.

Based on the limited responses provided, at least 75 PRs receive services from the responding organisations each month. The main needs of newcomers were reported to be information and orientation, language training, integration support, assistance finding a job and with daily life. At least 3 respondents thought that all of the services listed in Appendix B need to be expanded, except: information and orientation, assistance finding a job and with daily life, financial supports, assistance setting up a business, investment opportunities, transportation supports, and assistance finding housing.

NEWCOMERS INELIGIBLE FOR CIC FUNDED SERVICES

At least 7 TFWs, 20 Naturalized Citizens, and 2 Live-In-Caregivers receive services each month. Additionally, in the month prior to the survey, at least 50 people whose category of entry is not known, 10 visitors, 5 Provincial Nomeees (PN), and 3 TFWs requested but did not receive services. The most needed services for CIC ineligible newcomers were reported to include: information and orientation; integration supports, needs assessment and referral, childcare, assistance finding a job and with daily life, and legal support. Specifically, at least 3 respondents reported that Naturalized Citizens and Refugee Claimants experience each of the needs listed in Appendix B. Respondents were slightly less likely to report that TFWs experience each of the needs listed, and 2-4 respondents indicated that each need is experienced by International Students. Feedback participants explained that as a winter resort, Whistler welcomes thousands of people on working holiday visas, in addition to large numbers of TFWs, and that all of these newcomers need support. They cautioned that providing services to some but not all newcomers creates divisions in the community. Participants stressed that it is important to serve people when they first arrive, and when they need help, even if they are not yet PRs, given that needs do not arise according to bureaucratic schedules. Respondents also noted the presence of a number of Naturalized Citizens who have been in Canada for many years, but struggle with English or literacy; participants wished they had adequate resources for outreach to inform such people of services that could address their long term settlement challenges.

Tracking and Planning

When asked whether their services for newcomers guided by a strategic plan, 3 respondents indicated that planning is done internally, and 4 reported that they plan jointly with other SPOs. One organisation stated that their services are not guided by a strategic plan. All respondents regularly assess the service needs of newcomers in their community; 2 internally and 4 jointly with other SPOs. The frequency of assessment varies. Assessment is mainly pursued through surveys, questionnaires, informal feedback, and needs assessments. Additional sources of information include Statistics Canada, CIC, municipal data, media reports, and other SPOs. In the feedback session, participants explained that there are unfortunately no annual reports on settlement achievements in their area.

Specific Capacities

With respect to specific organizational capacities, most respondents reported that they do not have adequate capacity in the areas listed in Appendix C apart from meet reporting requirements, create governing and strategic plan; and communicate with stakeholders. Respondents were almost unanimous that they will need additional future capacity in all of the areas listed in Appendix C.

Partnerships

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). All respondents reported that their organisation carries out welcoming, settlement, and integration activities in partnership with other SPOs. Three or more respondents partner with all of the agencies listed in Appendix D except for francophone organizations, and in 2 cases such a partnership was desired. Five respondents noted that they desired partnerships with Chambers of Commerce and local businesses who sponsor large numbers of newcomers but take little responsibility for their settlement. In the feedback session, participants emphasized the need for greater collaboration among SPOs and urged the creation of a LIP in Sea to Sky to reinvigorate and formalize the relationships that ended when Welcoming Communities funding dried up, and to ensure support for much needed partnerships with employers.

Research Team

Miu Chung Yan, Ph.D. (*Co- Principal Investigator*)
Jenny Francis, Ph.D. Candidate (*Co-author*)

University of British Columbia
Tel: 604-822-8688, Miu.Yan@ubc.ca

Bill Ashton, Ph.D. (*Principal Investigator*)
Rachael Pettigrew, Ph.D. (*Research Associate*)
Eleni Galatsanou, MSc (*Project Coordinator*)

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University
Tel: 204-571-8513, Ashtonw@brandonu.ca

Lori Wilkinson, Ph.D. (*Chair of Project Advisory Panel*)

University of Manitoba
Tel: 204- 474-8491, Lori.Wilkinson@umanitoba.ca

Appendix A – Possible Concerns about Access to Services

- Lack of services in community
- Confusion about where to get help
- Not being eligible for services
- Language difficulties
- Lack of childcare
- Transportation difficulties
- Hours of the day that services are offered
- Financial difficulties
- Discrimination because of being a newcomer
- Discrimination because of race or ethnicity

Appendix B – 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 C – Possible Organizational Capacities

- Staff to provide services
- Financial support from government sources to maintain current services
- Financial support from non-government sources to maintain current services
- Communication with stakeholders
- Coordinating services with other service providers
- Staff skills for delivery and maintenance of services
- Mobilization of community to support and welcome newcomers
- Creation of governing and strategic plan
- Meet reporting requirements
- Provide services in both official languages