



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Thompson, Manitoba

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

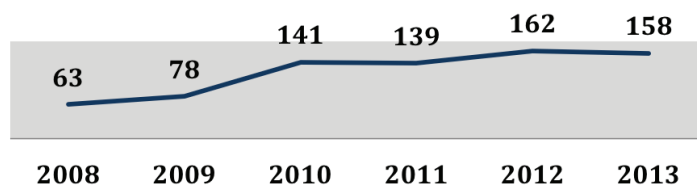


Population (2011): 12,839 residents

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census

Permanent Resident Landings Thompson 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



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Data sources: 2 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs)

- Findings validated locally with 4 additional immigration stakeholders in Thompson.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

- Information and orientation, needs assessment, childcare, legal support/referral
- Language training
- Assistance finding housing
- Cultural events; social integration



Key gaps identified

- Interpretation services
- Language assessment and medical exams for permanent residence application only offered in Winnipeg
- Job specific and advanced language training
- Services for youth and seniors
- Childcare
- Help with daily life
- More services need to expand



Barriers to access services

- Language difficulties of newcomers and lack of interpretation services
- Remote location and transportation difficulties
- Limited services and resources. Some services only available in Winnipeg
- Lack of childcare



Top services needed

- Language training (with flexible hours) and assessment
- Foreign credential recognition
- Transportation
- Interpretation
- Assistance finding housing



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Language training and assessment, assistance with immigration applications, information on Canadian laws and worker rights, assistance finding employment, welcoming activities

PARTNERSHIPS



In Thompson, only one of the two service providers sampled was working in partnership. The one SPO identified partnerships with: Employment Manitoba, Service Canada, schools/school board, umbrella organization, SPOs, health services, municipalities, language training providers, the chamber of commerce, public libraries, and labour market services. Partnerships are desired with employers, multicultural organization and all levels of government.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



The perception of how easy it was for newcomers to settle in Thompson was mixed. The harsh climate, remote location, expensive and scarce housing, acceptance by locals and few services offered are the main challenges newcomers are facing. Participants agreed that it was easy or somewhat easy for newcomers to get jobs in Thompson, but usually in low skill/entry level positions. Foreign credential recognition, language and childcare are the key barriers identified.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Thompson, Manitoba

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 Thompson, Manitoba and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Thompson by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Thompson. Data was collected in October and November 2014 from 2 organizations serving newcomers in Thompson through a telephone survey completed with a representative from each organization. A draft of the Thompson community report was shared with both survey participants and with an additional 8 immigration stakeholders in the community. A teleconference feedback session was held with one of the two survey participants and written feedback was received from the other survey participant and 4 diverse stakeholders. The feedback received was then applied to the final report to improve the accuracy of the overall report.

Background

Established in 1956, Thompson is a rural and remote community located 765 kilometres north of Winnipeg and is known as the "Hub of the North." It should be noted that both the far northern and remote location of Thompson presents unique challenges for newcomer settlement and service delivery. Industry in Thompson is mainly focused on the mining, milling, smelting, refining of nickel, and cold weather testing facilities. In the 1960s the town had a population of 20,000 residents, but has seen some decline in the last 50 years and now has 12,839¹. A large proportion of Thompson's residents, 35.2%, identify as Aboriginal, First Nations, or Metis and another 7% identify as a member of a visible minority group.

Community Settlement Concerns

Both participants felt the number of newcomers settling in Thompson had increased in the last 5 years. The main explanation for this growth in the newcomer population was rooted in employment opportunities and family and faith based group sponsorships.

The two participants had differing opinions regarding how easily newcomers could settle into the community. One service provider felt newcomer settlement was difficult in Thompson because the weather is hard, housing was very expensive and hard to find, resources are limited, and there are few services. In the feedback received stakeholders emphasized there is a low rental vacancy rate in Thompson and, though housing costs are less expensive than other northern communities (e.g., Yellowknife), housing is still expensive when compared to Southern Manitoba. In addition, there are some challenges in the community with the acceptance of newcomers and sensitivity to those of different ethnic and religious origins. The other service provider felt newcomer settlement was somewhat easy because in a small community referrals to and awareness of services was high, strong family support, and entry-level jobs were frequently available.

Both participants agreed it was somewhat easy or easy for newcomers to get jobs, but this is the case for low skill, entry-level employment. For newcomers to move into a profession, both participants agreed this is difficult due to language and foreign credential recognition difficulties. Foreign credential recognition comes with a cost, often requires sitting exams, and demands quite a bit of time and energy, but right now there is a lack of funding to support newcomers through this process. Lack of childcare was also identified as one of the main barriers to getting a job in Thompson. Though CIC now funds childcare while newcomers receive settlement services the availability of childcare becomes a challenge when newcomers start employment, which means in many cases the wife stays home to care for children. The lack of available childcare can be very stressful for families.

The remote and northern location of Thompson presents a number of challenges for newcomers and service providers. First, it limits the number of newcomers arriving and can also lead to higher rates of post-landing relocation to larger cities. Second, not all services are available in Thompson (e.g., International English Language Testing System and the medical examinations required for permanent residents) and this means there is often significant cost to travel to Winnipeg. In some cases, newcomers delay their application for permanent residence due to the costs associated with travelling to Winnipeg.

1. Statistics Canada, 2011 Census Profile

Complicating matters, the CIC does not permit English as an Additional Language (EAL) students to be registered in or to be issued a Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) certificate unless they have been assessed by Winnipeg English Language Assessment and Referral Centre (WELARC) which can only be done in Winnipeg. WELARC sends an assessor in Thompson, but this has only happened twice in the last two years. This CIC policy directly disadvantages newcomers solely based on their geographic location and proximity to an agency offering assessment.

Finally, those newcomers interested in upgrading their education have only one local option at the University College of the North (UCN) and this institution has limited curriculum and classes are often full. Basic and intermediate EAL classes are offered in Thompson, but students would need to travel to Winnipeg for more advanced EAL courses. More funding for more EAL teachers is required to meet the need of newcomers in Thompson. In any case, it is clear a national CIC policy for service delivery does not always work for northern communities and that future policy development should take the unique needs and concerns of northern and remote community into consideration.

Available Settlement Services

A moderate mix of settlement services are offered in Thompson (for a list of possible settlement services see Appendix A) such as: greeting upon arrival, info and orientation, needs assessment and referral, assistance finding housing, help with recognition of foreign credentials, childcare, cultural events, legal support/referral, social integration support and language training. Services offered were identified by both participants as needing to be expanded; especially credential recognition, language training, childcare, and services for youth. In Thompson, those seeking language training are facing waiting lists, which began last year as demand has increased. Key gaps in services offered in Thompson are: interpretation services (newcomers rely on family to interpret), language assessment, job specific and more advanced language training, transportation support, health and mental health services, services for seniors and youth, assistance setting up a business, occupational/business mentorship and networking, financial supports, and recreational services.

The top services, which were identified by participants as needed by newcomers were language training and assessment that meets a variety of needs and schedules, recognition of foreign credentials, transportation, assistance finding housing, and interpretation services. In the feedback received it was cited that language training is currently offered after hours.

In regards to newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services, participants indicated temporary foreign workers (TFW), new and returning naturalized citizens, and refugee claimants were all in need of settlement services. International students were not identified as being a newcomer group in need of services, because participants were unaware of any international students completing degree work in Thompson given the limited availability of post secondary institutions. Language assessment and training, assistance completing immigration applications, information on Canadian laws and worker rights, help finding employment and welcoming activities, were all listed as the services most needed by newcomers who are ineligible for services. Though it should be noted one stakeholder indicated, refugee claimants, in some cases, have access to language training classes in Thompson.

Several barriers to accessing services were identified by participants. In Thompson, a key barrier identified was the small size of the community and, though everyone is aware of the services for newcomers, there are not a great number of services available. Language difficulties of newcomers, lack of interpretation services, the harsh climate and transportation difficulties, remote location of the community, the fact that some services are only available in Winnipeg, and lack of childcare were identified as the key barriers for newcomers to access services. Childcare is indeed a concern and not just for newcomers, but for the community as a whole.

Tracking and Planning

Both participating service providers reported their organization regularly assessed the need of newcomers in their community. These needs assessments were informal in nature and took a variety of forms (i.e., survey clients, focus groups).

Specific Capacities

In Thompson, the two organizations that participated in the survey had mixed organizational capacity. Both organizations felt they had adequate financial support from government sources, but both agreed they did not have enough financial support from other sources (e.g., municipal and provincial). However, CIC funding currently covers day-to-day operational expenses, but truly more funding is necessary to support newcomers' needs and expand programming. More funding is needed to help with those newcomers whom are ineligible for CIC funding as well. In addition, more funding is required to allow for the use of capacity (time and energy) needed to develop more meaningful relationships with SPOs and community stakeholders. It was mentioned by 3 of the 6 individuals

who offered feedback that the Multicultural organization needs reliable sources of funding as the organization provided valuable services and partnerships in the community. Neither organization felt they had enough capacity to create governing and strategic plans or provide services in both official languages. The remaining items on the list (see appendix C) one participant said they currently had enough capacity and the other felt they did not. A concern was also expressed about staff capacity and staff turnover, which is a more frequently concern in the northern communities where resident mobility tends to be higher. Finally, it is worth mentioning SPOs in Thompson provide services over the phone or via e-mail to newcomers in other remote northern communities such as the Pas, Churchill etc.

Partnerships

Partnerships between SPOs and community stakeholders were reported in Thompson (for a list of possible partnerships see Appendix B), however it is clear through the feedback received more partnerships and more engaged activity within partnerships is required in Thompson. Partnerships were reported with Employment Manitoba, Service Canada, the schools, school board, umbrella organization, SPOs, health services, municipalities, language training providers, the chamber of commerce, public libraries, 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). Integration, welcoming, and settlement activities were all conducted in partnership. However, settlement services desired more partnerships with employers. The employers are often the first point of contact with the newcomers, but are not always referring the newcomers to local settlement services, perhaps because they feel the services are not needed or because they think employees do not have time. In the feedback received, one participant suggested SPOs should form partnerships with all businesses in Thompson have hired newcomers. Businesses thinking of hiring newcomers would benefit from the experience of settlement service providers. In addition, a partnership with the Multicultural organization is desired once the current period of transition is over. Finally, one SPO indicated a more active partnership is needed with all levels of government on order to work in collaboration to meet the settlement needs of newcomers.

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Appendix A – List of Possible Services

SETTLEMENT

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

ECONOMIC

- j. Help finding a job
- k. Educational upgrading
- l. Recognition of foreign credentials
- m. Investment opportunities
- n. Job-specific language training
- o. Help setting up a business
- p. Occupational/business mentorship and networking
- q. Financial supports

SOCIAL

- r. Childcare
- s. Cultural Events
- t. Recreational services
- u. Legal support/referral
- v. Health Services
- w. Mental Health Services
- x. Social inclusion/ integration support
- y. Services for seniors
- z. Services for women
- aa. Services for youth

Appendix B – Possible Organizational Partnerships

- School/School Boards
- Umbrella organizations
- Newcomers (individuals)
- Housing services
- Settlement service providers
- Health services
- Municipal offices/ EDO
- Civil society groups
- Francophone organizations
- Language training providers
- Children/Family services
- Businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Police Force
- Universities/Research Networks
- Ethno-cultural groups
- Religious organizations
- Public libraries
- Foundations

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
- Creation of governing and strategic plan
- Meet reporting requirements
- Provide services in both official languages