



Thunder Bay Immigration Forum

November 28, 2007 • Valhalla Inn • Thunder Bay

Building Bridges



SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS



Dear Thunder Bay Immigration Forum Delegate:

As a recent editorial in the Chronicle Journal pointed out, demographers tell us that "Canada's population growth will be entirely dependent on immigration by 2030 and communities that don't attract Canadians may see steady declines in population. Fewer citizens mean lower tax revenues, less ability by business to prosper and a gradual decline in services and quality of life".

The North Superior Training Board's TOP (Trends, Opportunities, Priorities) regional consultation process pointed to the lack of immigration into Northern Ontario as a key barrier to economic development. The Forum was organized in response to this trend, but also with an eye to the more distant future so that we do not see an erosion of the quality of life in our Northern Ontario communities.

We were successful in attracting an excellent cross section of the community including large and small business, government, education, health care, social services, literary agencies, youth and financial institutions. In total, more than 70 people took part in the Forum. Overall, the Forum received an impressive rating of 4.9 out of a possible 5 points, with a score of 5 being "Excellent". Similarly the workshops and keynotes also received great reviews. Comments from delegates included the following:

- Very well organized Forum with great speakers and resource people
- This was great!
- What a friendly, well organized Forum
- Keynote speeches were very interesting
- Well done and timely!
- I found today's topics very eye-opening
- Thank you for your hard work in organizing this event

Thank you for taking part in the Forum. We look forward to working with you again.

Yours truly,

Marg Scott
Executive Director
North Superior Training Board

Cathy Woodbeck
Executive Director
Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

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Introduction

Immigration is increasingly being viewed as an important economic development tool right across the country. With labour shortages continuing to challenge our economic growth, it is integral that we understand the policies and guidelines that govern our abilities to bring in skilled workers and business immigrants from around the globe and be clear on what it will take to attract and retain these people.

With this in mind, the North Superior Training Board, working with the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association and a variety of community partners staged the Thunder Bay Immigration Forum – Building Bridges on November 28, 2007 at the Valhalla Inn. The focus of the keynote presentations and workshops was on reviewing existing programs and service gaps, examining strategies to attract and retain immigrants for our workforce, looking at ways to retain immigrants in the work setting and the transition into the Canadian work culture.

Our morning keynote presenter, Randy Boldt of Mercan Capital, set the scene with an interesting overview of the history of immigration to Canada along with a discussion of what the future may hold.

Following this, delegates had the option of three workshops, one providing information on government programs to assist immigration initiatives, another on successful immigration strategies in other communities and the third on the experiences of several of our local immigrants.

Another highlight of the morning was the launch of the Thunder Bay Newcomer Network web site. With the goal of welcoming newcomers to the Thunder Bay community and helping them settle their family and discover friendships in our community, the site has already received 500 hits in its first week of operation. The new web site can be found at www.ThunderBayNOW.com

At lunch time, Dr. Linda Manning spoke eloquently on the many ways to leverage the talents of immigrants to strengthen businesses here in Thunder Bay and in the region.

The afternoon workshops offered information on Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration initiatives, on how to attract entrepreneurs and investors and on what is happening locally to attract and retain immigrants.

Finally, delegates took part in a Closing Plenary Session facilitated by Dr. Manning, entitled "Next Steps: How do We Build the Bridges?" This was a session that featured excellent input from a good number of participants on what they gained from the Forum as well as what they believed the next steps should be. High on the list was the desire to establish an Immigration Steering Committee to determine interest in developing a comprehensive immigration strategy.

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PROGRAM

- 7:45 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. **Registration and Refreshments**
Scandia Lobby
- 8:30 a.m. – 8:50 a.m. **Opening Remarks and Greetings**
Scandia 1 and 2
- Madge Richardson, Co-chair
Marg Scott, Executive Director
North Superior Training Board
- Cathy Woodbeck, Executive Director
Thunder Bay Multicultural Association
- Mayor Lynn Peterson
City of Thunder Bay
- Letter of Greetings
Hon. Michael Gravelle
Minister of Northern Development and Mines
- Peter Armstrong, Regional Director
Employment and Training Division, North Region Branch
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- 8:50 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. **Keynote Address**
Immigration in Canada: Opportunities and Challenges
Scandia 1 and 2
- Randy Boldt, Vice President
Mercan Capital
- A former Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration for the Province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Boldt will speak about immigration Best Practices in that province as well as in Manitoba, along with the opportunities and obstacles facing Thunder Bay in developing its immigration programs.

9:50 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Refreshment Break

Thunder Bay Newcomers Club Website Launch
Scandia Lobby

10:05 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions

Session A

Fast Tracking Immigration to Ontario
Odin Room

Alan Diner, Manager
Pilot Provincial Nominee Program (PNP)

Nadine Heaslip, Manager
Service Delivery, Service Canada (Ontario Region)

The words "fast tracking" and "government" are not always thought of at the same time but in the case of these programs, the red tape is dramatically reduced. Find out how to get the immigrant workforce that you need much faster than you had thought.

Session B

Successful Immigrant Attraction and Integration Strategies
Scandia 3

Kelly McGahey, Director of Stakeholder Relations
Hire Immigrants Ottawa

Ann Welsh, Project Researcher
North Bay Newcomer Network

Randy Boldt, Vice President
Mercan Capital

What are other cities doing right to attract and retain immigrants? What hasn't worked? Learn more about programs that have been undertaken in Ottawa, North Bay and cities in Western Canada.

Session C

A Walk in our Shoes: The Immigrant Experience in
Thunder Bay and Immigrant Student Retention Strategies
Fireside Room

Panel: Tanka Awisoka, International Student Advisor, Lakehead University; Dr. Seth Agbo, Chair, Lifelong Learning, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University; Amina Abu-Bakare, Member, Thunder Bay Newcomers Club; Michelle McKenzie-Lander, Director, North Superior Training Board.

Short sleeves in winter? It could happen! Join this panel of immigrants to hear their informative—and sometimes amusing—recounts of their first Thunder Bay experiences. The panel will also share their thoughts on how to entice foreign students to stay here after graduation.

11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Networking

Scandia Lobby

11:50 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Lunch and Keynote Address

Leveraging Immigrant Skills to Strengthen Canadian Businesses

Scandia 1 and 2

Dr. Linda Manning, Director
Department of Economics,
University of Ottawa

How can hiring immigrants actually increase employment opportunities for locals? Dr. Manning will explore this often ignored benefit of increased immigration and will discuss strategies aimed at improving awareness about the positive role that immigration can play, both culturally and economically.

1:35 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

Session D

Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Perspectives

Odin Room

Riet Verheggen, Director, Immigration Branch
Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration

This session will focus on the Government of Ontario's Immigration Programs (settlement, language training, and labour market integration including Global Experience Ontario) and patterns of immigration. What are the implications for the North? Find out here.

Session E

Attracting Investors and Entrepreneurs

Fireside Room

Lawrence Hynes, Manager
Business Immigration Section
Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

Dave Laderoute
District Manager
Ministry of Northern Development and Mines

Immigrant investors and entrepreneurs can strengthen a community's economy by creating jobs and offering solutions to succession planning issues. Learn about the programs and services that exist to support this important type of immigration.

Session F

Local Immigration Initiatives

Scandia 3

John DeGiacomo, Manager, Student Placement
Lakehead University/Thunder Bay Newcomers Club

Cathy Woodbeck, Executive Director
Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

Lynn Reid, Home Visiting Supervisor
Out Kids Count

Hiroko Moller, Volunteer
Our Kids Count

In order to move forward, we need to have a good awareness of what is already happening to attract and retain immigrants here in Thunder Bay. There is more going on than perhaps you had thought! Find out what's happening now and what is planned for the future.

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Refreshment Break

Scandia Lobby

3:20 p.m. – 4:20 p.m.

Plenary Discussion

Next Steps: *How Do We Build the Bridges?*

Scandia 1 and 2

Facilitator: Dr. Linda Manning, University of Ottawa

What are the logical next steps for Thunder Bay businesses, organizations, agencies and government to develop and implement a comprehensive immigration strategy? Veteran facilitator and immigration expert Dr. Linda Manning will facilitate the discussions with the aim of developing a plan of action.

4:20 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Wrap Up

Morning Keynote: *Immigration – Opportunities and Challenges*

Presenter: Randy Boldt, Vice President, Mercan Capital

We are a country of immigrants, the first ones having arrived some 20-40,000 years ago from Asia. Canada currently accepts more immigrants per capita than any other country in the world. Net in-migration into Canada is 5.85 immigrants per 1,000 people, illustrative of the magnitude of immigration into Canada and the importance we place on immigration.

More than any other country in the world, Canadians believe that immigration positively benefits our country, with 77% saying that immigrants are a good influence and only 18% believing they are a bad influence. No other country in the world has even close to this level of acceptance of immigration.

Based on current levels of immigration and fertility rates, by 2029 (22 years from now), the entire increase in Canada's population will come from immigration. Currently, we are bringing in very large numbers of immigrants – approximately 250,000 per year, mostly in response to our demographic and employment needs in our country. Of these, approximately 60% come as economic immigrants with approximately 15% arriving on humanitarian grounds and 25% coming as family members.

The source countries from where immigrants are coming, has changed significantly in the last few decades. Currently, the majority (50%) of immigrants come from Asia.

The Federal Skilled worker stream remains the largest stream of immigrants coming to Canada. Immigrants in this category are selected based on six factors:

- Education
- Language
- Work Experience
- Age
- Arranged Employment
- Adaptability

There are two large groups coming to Canada that are not yet immigrants: foreign students and temporary workers. Both of these groups have seen substantial levels in the past decade. The federal government has taken and is taking major steps to facilitate these people to become immigrants without having to leave the country. This will take large numbers of spots away from an already stretched economic program, assuming current levels remain unchanged at around 250,000 per year. The current levels of economic immigrant levels are not enough to accommodate substantial increases expected to come from an in-Canada class. There are really only a few options open to resolving this situation:

- 1 - increase the overall numbers of immigrants coming to Canada,
- 2 - change the make-up of immigrants - altering the current 60 -25 -15 percentages for economic class, family members and humanitarian categories,
- 3 - increase the points it takes to qualify as a skilled worker,

or a combination of these three options. I would prefer an option which fast tracks certain preferred candidates; those with critical skills and abilities, with the balance having to wait until their applications can be processed.

I would now like to turn our attention to some of the other difficulties we have and are experiencing in Canada.

Immigrant selection remains one of the most important jobs for our governments, but the challenges to ensure that the system is honest and fair in providing Canada with skilled and educated people have never been greater. Some of the challenges we are facing include:

- Security checks and documentation checks in many countries is extremely difficult.
- Balancing pressures on various classes.
- The dysfunction between the selection of immigrants and meeting labour market needs.
- Problems in FCR, PWR, Canadian experience
- Regionalization

We only have a limited number of immigration spots every year, so how do we go about allocated spaces to re-uniting families, economic development and fulfilling our global social responsibilities? Spousal reunification is one of the most important categories to expedite, along provincial nominees, high risk refugees, Federal and Quebec investors, and the soon to be announced in-Canada class. With a backlog now stretching at three years or more in many visa posts, it is likely that those who are not a priority will have to wait even longer in years to come.

Immigrants are always stating that they have difficulties in getting jobs commensurate with their qualifications. A common complaint among immigrants is that their education and experience are often dismissed by Canadian employers.

Immigration has historically been a mechanism for growing the regions in Canada. Immigrants moved to the prairies to settle land or to Thunder Bay to work on the docks or in the natural resource sector. With the current Federal Model, and under the previous Act, immigration became focussed on our three largest cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, which have received 70-80% of immigrants in the last few decades.

The advent of the Provincial Nominee Programs allow provinces, which have more recently seen immigration numbers decline, to attract and recruit immigrants more aggressively. Manitoba was the first province to do so, and in the first 8 years of its nominee program, it has seen immigration grow by a factor of 300%. Business immigration has even grown by a greater amount of over 1,000%. This trend is now accelerating.

Finally, I would like to comment on international trade and immigration. Canada's exports to the rest of the world, outside the USA, rose by 68% from 2002 to 2006, with only a 5% increase to the USA in the same period of time. Exports to China doubled in that period and have risen a further 47% in the first 7 months of 2007. If you are going to do business outside of Canada and the USA, then I strongly advise you to recruit people with the necessary language and cultural skills to assist you.

As the world continues to get smaller, it is my sincere hope that Canada will remain a country of immigrants. Immigrants are a gift to our country, bringing their education, skills, energy, experience, new ideas and hopes and dreams to help Canada.

Workshop A: Fast Tracking Immigration to Ontario

Presenter: Alan Diner, Manager, Pilot Provincial Nominee Program (Pilot PNP)

In May 2007, Ontario established the Pilot Provincial Nominee Program (Pilot PNP) to allow employers to attract skilled immigrants to meet their business needs. Employers in 20 targeted occupations are eligible to recruit professionals or skilled workers to fill their human resources needs. Recruits may be from abroad or already here in Canada (such as temporary foreign workers, international students or visitors).

The process works like this:

- (1) An employer in a targeted occupation applies to have a position approved by the program.
- (2) If the position is approved, the employer forwards a nominee application to the selected candidate.
- (3) The candidate submits the nominee application, along with the application fee, to the program. If the application is approved, the provincial government will nominate the candidate and their family to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for fast-tracked permanent residency and support their application for an interim work permit.

Eligible Occupations are:

Health Sector

Specialist Physicians
General Practitioners and Family Physicians
Pharmacists
Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists
Physiotherapists
Registered Nurses
Medical Laboratory Technologists
Medical Radiation Technologists

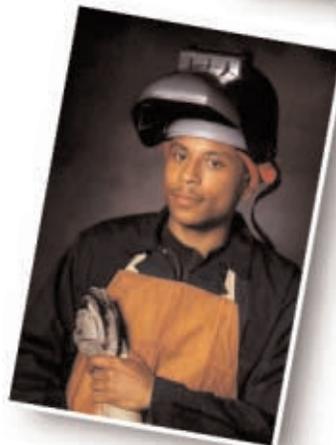


Education Sector

University Professors
High-End Researchers

Manufacturing Sector

Machinists and Machining and Tooling Inspectors
Tool and Die Makers
Industrial Electricians
Construction Millwrights and Industrial Mechanics
Heavy-Duty Equipment Mechanics



Construction Sector

Carpenters
Bricklayers
Cement Finishers
Tile setters
Drywall Installers and Finishers

For employers, the program:

- caters to their human resource needs,
- facilitates the quick arrival of needed employees; and,
- has a free and timely application process (fee is only required with the nominee application package).

Individuals benefit from:

- a permanent, full-time job in Ontario at a prevailing wage;
- an employer-driven system based on labour market needs, rather than on a point system;
- students do not require one year of experience, unlike under the federal Skilled Worker Class;
- priority processing by Citizenship and Immigration Canada;
- a faster route to permanent resident status

Presenter: Nadine Heaslip, Manager, Service Delivery, Service Canada (Ontario Region)

Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), Service Canada (SC) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) work to ensure that the employment of foreign workers supports economic growth and helps create more opportunities for all Canadians. All foreign workers have the same rights and protections as all Canadian workers.

How to Hire a Foreign Worker for a Temporary Period

Most foreign workers require a valid permit to work in Canada. For employers interested in hiring a foreign worker, there are three basic requirements:

- The job offer must be approved through SC
- The applicant must be assessed by CIC and
- A work permit must be issued to the foreign worker by CIC

Special criteria apply for some industry sectors and occupations and special exemptions may also apply.

Hiring Skilled Workers or Supporting their Immigration to Canada

There are two processes to support immigration to Canada:

- The skilled worker initially obtains a temporary work permit while applying to CIC. SC's initial assessment process is the same as the one for hiring a foreign worker temporarily (labour market opinion)
- The employer makes a job offer but the skilled worker waits to obtain permanent residence before beginning to work in Canada. This involves a different SC assessment process (arranged employment opinion)

Hiring Someone Temporarily while Supporting their Immigration Application

There are four basic requirements:

- The job offer must be approved through SC
- The applicant must be assessed by CIC
- A work permit must be issued to the foreign worker
- The worker must then apply for and obtain a skilled worker permanent resident visa

Masking a Job Offer but Waiting until the Person Becomes a Permanent Resident

There are three basic requirements:

- The permanent job offer must be approved by SC
- The worker must be assessed by CIC and
- A permanent resident visa must be issued to the skilled worker

For more information: www.hrsdc.gc.ca

Follow links to Policies and Programs and to Foreign Workers

www.cic.gc.ca

Workshop B: Successful Immigrant Attraction and Integration Strategies

Presenter: Randy Boldt, Vice President, Mercan Capital

Immigrant attraction is a combination of attracting people who are being pushed from their home country, and a local community having something to offer.

People leave their home country for three main reasons,

- financial,
- security, and
- family

Immigrants typically move to and remain in a location due to work and family.

Canada is thought of a family-friendly country offering a safe environment with good education (remember, we have the highest level of University graduates in the world). We are also thought of as more family-orientated than the UK, and are generally thought of as being safer than the USA.

Successful immigration strategies build on these themes.

5-50 years ago Winnipeg had a vibrant garment industry. Recruitment of needle trade workers was difficult. It looked to draw from Philippine community. The success of the dramatic rise in the Philippine community in the last 5-10 years is no longer due to the garment industry, but the success of the Philippine community in Winnipeg – in a wide range of fields. In many ways, the service sector is the new needle trade.

The German community in Southern Manitoba was developed due to local business people making investments in private companies. The rationale was that they wanted to ensure that there were jobs available for young people when they graduated from high school. High school graduates still left (but in lower numbers), and the number of job increases was more than what the local population could provide through natural birth rates.

Critical to having a successful strategy is having a program. These two movements were successful as a direct result of the introduction of Manitoba's Nominee Program. Immigration to the province tripled in eight years. Saskatchewan is seeing a similar increase. Towns like Tisdale and cities like Saskatoon are able to attract and retain Ukrainian immigrants to fill the

job shortages in those communities. The Philippine community is also seeing a huge growth, similar to what we have seen in Manitoba.

It is difficult for a government to target immigrant communities directly, but rather it is better to support employers and communities.

In Manitoba, attempts were made for years to increase business immigration without a program. Business immigration was stuck at 10-15 per year, with low levels of investment. A successful program was able to increase investment attraction by 10 times.

In addition to attracting immigrants, retention is equally important. In Quebec, Manitoba and BC, funding is administered by the provincial governments. In the rest of the country, the funding is administered by the Federal government. It is critical that the settlement dollars support recruitment efforts. This is particularly true in smaller communities.

Efficient immigration is critically important in meeting the needs of universities, hospitals, and senior executives of multinational corporations.

Development of a regional program can include four areas:

1. A nominee program (preferably with a family component)
2. Foreign Student Movement
3. Foreign worker program
4. Family category

Presenter: Kelly McGahey, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Hire Immigrants Ottawa

Supported by a foundation of research and engagement by the Internationally Trained Workers Partnership, Hire Immigrants Ottawa is a new local initiative that brings together employers, immigrant agencies and stakeholders to create employment opportunities for skilled immigrants in Ottawa.

The prime objective of Hire Immigrants Ottawa is to increase the number of employers who hire skilled immigrants. This will be achieved through a multi-pronged approach, implemented over the course of three years, to include:

- Creating an "Employer Council of Champions" (ECC), featuring top Ottawa employers that will champion the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour force;
- Establishing "Working Groups" to include members from business, employers, immigrant agencies, unions, government, and educational institutions among others, working to address systemic barriers in the health care, information technology, finance and public sectors; and
- Launching a local awareness campaign to promote greater understanding of the social and economic value immigrants bring to Ottawa.

By engaging large and small and medium sized employers in the public and private sectors, this project has already created new employment opportunities and has begun to tackle systemic barriers to employment for skilled immigrants. The Working Groups are engaged in innovative new activities already, and are creating action plans for moving forward.

Achievements and shared lessons learned since the launch of the Employer Council of Champions and the Working Groups this past April include the following:

- The initiative has already surpassed by close to double the numeric targets for skilled immigrant hires by participating employers
- Local agencies that provide employment services to immigrants have formed their own complimentary working group in order to collaborate to better meet the needs of employers
- It is imperative to create awareness around the issue and to make the business case
- Many SMEs require extra tools and resources to increase their capacity to effectively integrate immigrants into their workplaces

Presenter: Ann Welsh, North Bay Newcomer Network

Northern Ontario is facing increasing economic and demographic challenges and North Bay is no exception. With that in mind, the City of North Bay's Mayor's Office of Economic Development (MOED) identified immigration as a priority area, as one part of the solution to projected economic decline.

In order to effectively understand and address this priority area, North Bay's MOED established the North Bay Newcomer Network (NNN), an immigration committee with representation from many community stakeholders. The objective of this committee is to develop strategies that will result in the attraction and retention of more immigrants to the community.

Facing several initial challenges, such as a lack of settlement services, NNN hosted an Immigration Strategy Symposium to identify gaps and needs in service delivery, explore ideas and solutions, and to gauge the community response to this initial suggestion.

Since the public consultation, NNN has been increasingly productive in terms of minimizing the barriers to this economic growth plan. Much work has been done to facilitate its implementation including (but not limited to) a year-long research project to identify the needs of newcomers, establishment of adult ESL, effective engagement with federal funders for settlement services, diversity outreach project, and the development of comprehensive, yet preliminary immigration strategy.

The draft immigration strategy has identified three key areas for the success of this population strategy: Attraction, Integration & Retention, and Welcoming Community. With the many federal and provincial opportunities currently available (COIA, PNP, etc), and the support of the local community, North Bay is effectively tapping the great possibilities and benefits of immigration as a growth strategy.

Although there are still key elements to put in place, NNN has realized that the most crucial aspects of this plan are community/regional collaboration and support, along with being continually aware of the municipal, provincial, federal, and international immigration opportunities and trends.

Workshop C: *A Walk in our Shoes: The Immigrant Experience in Thunder Bay and Immigrant Student Retention Strategies*

Presenter: Amina Abu-Bakare

Amina Abu-Bakare, born in Bromley Kent, England to Nigerian parents, has lived in various countries around the world before moving to Saint John, New Brunswick from Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, May 1995, and then to Thunder Bay August, 2000. This is her story:

Our main reason for moving to Canada was to give our daughters an opportunity at acquiring a university education in a stable environment. Due to the political situation in Nigeria, and the fact that life in the Gulf was transient, we felt that moving back to Canada would best.

My husband who is a Canadian and is a Canadian-trained physician felt that our children would be better off here in Canada. What he failed to tell me was, we would be considered inferior to the white Canadians, and since we had never had to consider ourselves inferior to anyone, that was a hard pill to swallow. He had to put up with being judged for his color rather than his qualifications, not just by the patients but by his colleagues. He had to constantly prove he was good enough, even though he was more qualified than most of his colleagues. You can imagine what this did to his morale and self-esteem.

My children were not spared either. They were constantly trying to prove themselves and where their fellow classmates got 100% they had to get 110% to be accepted. They were constantly made to feel they did not belong. Their classmates were not so bad in that they would play with them at school but they were not invited to their homes or birthday parties. They learned quickly enough that when a friend said "I will come to your house after school" that it would not happen. They questioned why they had to be treated like outcasts.

This whole vicious circle put tremendous pressure on us as a family and I used to question the rationale of us coming to Canada. I watched as my formerly carefree kids started questioning their identity. As a mother that was the hardest part to bear. Having now lived in Canada for this long, I now see why Immigrants would seek out their own community whether it be in Toronto or Montreal.

My advice to communities wanting to welcome immigrants would be, in using the words of my then 9 year old daughter - people are like a book that should never be judged by the cover but for the many pages inside hold wondrous knowledge and wisdom. In hindsight, we are all having the same hopes, dreams and aspirations.

Presenter: Dr. Seth Agbo, Chair, Lifelong Learning, Faculty of Education Lakehead University

Two major factors have influenced the migration of African immigrants to the United States and Canada since the 1980s. The first is the changing immigration policies of colonial powers that hitherto had historical and political ties with African countries. Colonial ties encouraged early migration of Africans to the United Kingdom, France and Belgium until these countries started experiencing a long period of economic recession, resulting in restrictive immigration policies that debarred Africans from entering without visas (Agbo, 2005).

The second is the more relaxed policies of the United States and Canada towards immigrants from developing countries. McClelland (1962) stated that for continuous economic growth, it was necessary for the U.S. to encourage immigration from the developing world rather than from European countries. He argued that immigrants from developing countries had a higher achievement motivation than those from the advanced countries in Europe and were apt to work harder to accelerate economic growth.

By 1965, the U.S. introduced the family reunification and refugee law which greatly favoured African immigrants. A decade or so later, Canada followed with similar laws. Since then there has been a steady influx of Africans into Canada and the United States. Many of the African immigrants are students who come to the United States and Canada for graduate studies and do not return to their home countries. Most of these African immigrants are highly educated and skilled (Agbo, 2005). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about one million Africans now live in the United States. The 2000 census also indicated that black African immigrants are the most educated of all immigrants in the U.S.

The number of African academics who receive education and training in Canada, and the proportion migrating to the United States to pursue professional careers, is steadily growing. I have been one of those African students educated in Canada who migrated to the United States for 7 years as a university professor before returning to Canada.

This presentation is about my immigrant experience in Canada.

Coming from Ghana to study in Canada as a graduate student in 1988, I felt welcomed to Lakehead University and to the City of Thunder Bay. My educational experience has been very pleasant. I was one of the fortunate immigrants who became an educator in isolated Northwestern Ontario communities immediately after completing a Master's degree in education at Lakehead University. I was a school principal on two First Nations reserves. I continued my graduate studies at the University of British Columbia where I obtained a PhD degree in 1996. It was after my PhD studies that I started facing the challenges that face many immigrants from Africa.

My experience is that African immigrants face a serious challenge when it comes to employment opportunities. I had a friend at Lakehead University of Kenyan parents, born in England. He completed his first degree in England before coming to Lakehead University for a master's program in Economics with a *Money and Banking* specialization. After completing his master's program, he applied for employment in several banking organizations in Canada. Seeing his impressive resume, three of the banks showed interest in employing him. While two of the banks invited him for job interviews, one of them offered him a position on the phone without inviting him for an interview. All that he was told by that particular bank was to go to Toronto to discuss his conditions of employment with the bank manager. When the bank discovered that he was not a white Englishman, the job was not offered to him. There are several similar scenarios where employers have sought lame excuses not to employ qualified African immigrants.

My own experience as PhD degree holder testifies to the fact that it is very difficult for qualified black Africans to secure jobs in Canada. After completing my PhD degree, I wanted to live and work in Canada but there was no way I could secure a job in Canada. I was one of

the numerous African academics who received education and training in Canada and migrated to the United States to pursue a professional career. I was offered several teaching positions in American universities before accepting my first teaching position at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Potsdam from 1997-2000. I moved from there to Pacific University in Oregon from 2000-2004, where I was appointed the Director of the Teacher Education program. I was able to return to Lakehead University in 2004 after I have researched and published extensively on First Nations and Native American education, lifelong learning policy, and comparative and international education while I was in the United States. In the U.S., I received several professional awards such as the Thomas Thompson Distinguished Professor in Education, and the Junior Faculty awards for teaching and research respectively. As soon as I returned to Canada I was awarded the Lakehead University Excellence in Teaching award in 2006 and recently in July 2007, I received the Province of Ontario Leadership in Faculty Teaching (LIFT) award, the most prestigious university teaching award in Ontario.

In the United States, it is very common to come across Canadian African academics educated in Canadian institutions and well qualified in professions such as engineering, medicine and architecture, who wish to return to work in Canada but cannot secure jobs. Several of these Canadian Africans hold very high positions in the United States. The rate of the Diaspora of Canadian Africans to the United States is alarming. Most of them have the idea that Canadian employers are not interested in offering them with job opportunities.

I cannot conclude this presentation without mentioning Air Canada experiences that are common with many Canadian Africans. I have made it a point that if I could, I will always avoid flying with Air Canada to any international destination. In June 2007, I was to travel to Vienna for a conference and to avoid Air Canada, I bought a Lufthansa ticket. Unfortunately, Air Canada, as a member of the Star Alliance, is the Lufthansa carrier from Toronto Pearson International Airport. I had no choice but to travel by Air Canada via Munich, Germany to Vienna, Austria. It was an uneventful flight to Vienna. The return trip however, became a nightmare.

At the Munich Airport, I passed through the security checks without any incidents. When the boarding time had come for flight number LH 9636 operated by Air Canada, I passed through the first passport check point without a problem. At a second check point just before climbing on the plane, the lady checking passports looked at my passport and asked me to stand aside. She then paged another security officer to take her place so that she could have time to deal with me. First, she asked to see another photo ID to prove I was a Canadian. I showed my citizenship card. She asked for my Social Insurance card. I provided it. She asked if I had any other ID to show. I produced my Ontario driver's license. She was not satisfied. She asked of the purpose of my trip to Vienna. I told her I went to present a paper at the Business Education Conference. She asked me to prove it. I showed her my conference name tag, the conference program, and proceedings with my published abstract. She was not impressed. She asked to show her proof that I traveled to Vienna from Toronto. I showed her my paper ticket and the Munich stamp in my passport. She was not satisfied.

She asked I should prove I was a professor at Lakehead University. I showed her my Departmental ID and Lakehead University Library card. She still was not impressed. She asked if there were any more proofs that I lived in Canada. I showed her my Safeway and A&P and

Zellers cards. She shrugged at them. Every passenger was now on board the flight. I was still waiting in front of the plane. The flight had delayed a few minutes to enable me to satisfy the whims and caprices of the Air Canada security lady. The last idea that came to me was that I had a business card in my wallet that I had not given her. I removed the card, gave to her, and said, "Oh yes, one more thing; whenever you're in Canada, call me and I'll give you a 'screw driver'". And that was the only time that she said, "You may go". I waited for a few seconds, stared at her, and asked calmly, "Why are you doing this to me?" She replied, "That's how it goes." I asked, "You mean because I'm black?" She replied, "You've got it."

At the Customs in Toronto I asked to see the immigration boss at the Airport. I was shown to the boss' office and there, I pulled my passport and banged it on the desk and asked, "What type of passport is this that you gave me? It doesn't seem to be good enough for Air Canada". The officer said my passport was as good as any Canadian passport and would like to know what happened. I told him the Munich story and he challenged me to take it up with Air Canada.

My Munich experience is an example of incidents that happen to black Canadian Africans at Schipol, Heathrow, Vienna, and many European Airports. There are several stories where medical doctors, and so on underwent similar experiences.

In conclusion, while Immigration Canada is aware of the value of immigrants in Canada, businesses and several organizations are ignorant of the process of admitting immigrants to Canada. Most employers, organizations, and establishments see immigrants, particularly black Africans as burden to the country. Can we learn the lessons from experiences of immigrants at this conference and shape a more compassionate strategy for the future treatment of immigrants?

The idea of immigrants as burden and are not good enough to be employed, that has dominated the thoughts of ordinary men and women in this country since the admission of African immigrants in 1960s has been demonstrably weak on fulfilling the ideals of immigration in socio-economic development and nation building. The treatments meted unto black Africans in Canada have made hundreds of educated and talented Africans vulnerable to a "United States temptation" that has produced a mass influx of these men and women to the United States. While I do not question Immigration Canada's policy on African immigrants, I question whether Immigration Canada has offered enough education to the Canadian public about the quality of these black African immigrants as the United states has done for example in its 2000 census indicating that black African immigrants are the most highly educated of all immigrants in the United States (see Agbo, 2005). In Canada, where the public has not been used to black African immigrants, there is a pressing need for devising a strategy that could educate employers to utilize the expertise of these highly qualified immigrants as a resource for Canada. Paradoxically enough, the more black Africans become educated with Canadian resources, the more they are apt to leave the country. The forces unleashed by the very process of higher education of Africans in Canada have managed to perpetuate a new form of migration to the United States. This migration has to stop.

Reference

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Presenter: Tanka Awisoka, International Student Advisor, Lakehead University

Life for international students who attend Canadian educational institutions is now much easier than it used to be. In 2005, the Federal Government introduced the *Off-campus Work Permit Program*, which has given all international students the opportunity to obtain employment off-campus. Prior to the implementation of this program, international students had to compete with Canadian students for a limited number of on-campus jobs. With this development, international students can now work off-campus to a maximum of 20 hrs per week - based on the agreement that they maintain their full-time student status and a satisfactory academic standing. Changes in these limitations are reflected during the summer break, when international students are permitted to work up to 40 hours per week.

Additionally, the *Post-graduation Work Permit* allows a graduating international student to work for up to two years in a field related to their area of educational study. Previously, this opportunity was limited to only one year. In order to obtain a *Post Graduation Work Permit*, students require both an offer of employment from an employer as well as a letter from their educational institution which either states that they have fulfilled the requirements of their program or have graduated.

Despite these developments, many international students still have a difficult time securing employment while studying in Canada. One problem in particular concerns the application process and matters relating to the student's eligibility to work in Canada. In most cases, a question regarding the interviewee's eligibility to work in Canada appears on the employment application form, and is generally asked by the interviewer during the interview process. Since students typically start searching for job opportunities several months before completing their academic year, they are technically not eligible to gain full-time employment when they submit their application forms or at the time of interview. Typically, this results in the student stating they are not eligible to work in Canada, and the employment process quickly comes to a halt.

It is unfortunate that most employers are still unaware of the *Post Graduation Work Permit*; they tend to disregard the student's explanation and reasoning behind answering eligibility questions, and view such discussions as the student's last and desperate attempt to secure employment. Many employers also still believe they require HRDC approval before they can hire any non-Canadian employees, so hiring international students becomes a practice that most employers tend to avoid altogether.

In summary:

1. International students can now work off-campus to a maximum of 20 hours per week based on the *Off-campus Work Permit Program*.
2. International students are able engage in full time employment after they graduate from their post secondary institutions.
3. Employers need to know that hiring an international student is not as tedious as most think.

Presenter: Michelle Lander, Director, North Superior Training Board

When I arrived in Thunder Bay 17 years ago on July 19, 1990, it was a big culture shock. My mind could not fathom a place where I was the minority.

I landed in Thunder Bay from Trinidad. My brief stop in the Toronto was not dramatic due to the presence of colour from one plane to the next. I could not wait to continue on to my final destination but as we flew over Thunder Bay, it looked so small and isolated. Worse, on landing the only presence of colour was the six strangers who had come to greet me. The excitement was gone and home sickness came over me right away before I even left the airport.

The walk in my shoes has been a long and hard one. Families like the Browns' who opened their home to students like myself helped a great deal as did Moffat Makuto and the Regional Multicultural Youth Centre which became my second home, providing both training and inspiration to succeed. The Thunder Bay Multicultural Association also provided the opportunity for me and many other groups to showcase their culture at the Folklore Festival. These people and experiences all played a major part in making my immigration experience it great one.

My immigration process was sure a mix of emotions. I thank God we have come a long way in processing immigrants and helping them transition into the main stream. There have been lots of ups and downs but I come from a long line of tough McKenzie women-- independent and strong--and I managed to get through the system well enough. Over the course of these 17 years, I have adjusted well and have even made Thunder Bay my home.



Luncheon Keynote: *Leveraging Immigrant Talent to Strengthen Canadian Business*

Presenter: Dr. Linda Manning, Director, Department of Economics, University of Ottawa

Today's environment is changing. The population of Canada and Ontario is growing at a much higher rate than that of Thunder Bay. Moreover, the average age in Thunder Bay is higher than that of Canada so we can expect to see a significant number of retirements here in the next few years. Consequently, the issue of immigration is even more important here. That is one focus of my project: the shortage of skills that we will face due to retirements. When I was reading about the problems facing Canada, organizations and employers, a recurring theme was both the shortage of skills and retirees.

How many of the speakers here today have just left university? We are in demand as speakers because we have both experience and knowledge. When I retire I guarantee I will take with me more than just the skills that I brought with me when I graduated from university. This sets the stage for my project.

We are going to talk about immigrants who are already employed, but rarely in management and leadership roles. Our focus is going to be on what is happening once immigrants gain employment and what are the barriers to their advancement in Canadian organizations.

We have some trends that are going on in the world, Canada, Ontario and Thunder Bay, and we have seen that things are changing. Of course, there is always resistance to change because we still want to do things the way we have always done them. And we are all competing with one another for immigrants.

But let's pretend I am not even talking about immigrants, but rather about this talent pool that is emptying quickly. We see structural shifts in the economy-- what we produce, how we produce it--how we are moving forward is changing and every time those things happen we have something we call structural unemployment. When layoffs occur because of structural change, and people are laid off they reduce their spending, which leads to more layoffs. This is a basic economic concept called the multiplier effect. You can also turn it around. Increasing peoples' incomes and expenditures leads to demand for more labour and more growth. If that is going to happen, there needs to be more working age people available and those employees must be skilled and talented even to maintain the same level of output that we have now.

In Thunder Bay there are other shifts going on, including an attempt to grow new industry. What will you need in order to do this? You need not just employees but also entrepreneurs. Where will they all come from? Outside Thunder Bay and Ontario, because they are not here. Happily, there is a very large pool of highly skilled and talented immigrants out there.

The challenge is first to attract immigration. Then you have to think about how to retain immigrants. So inclusiveness is what we need to think about.

So, do immigrants fit into our organizations? In reviewing the list of the top 15 non regulated occupations of immigrants to Canada in the year 2005, are the skills and attributes that you need in this list? Obviously, I think that there are.

Another way to look at this is in the shift of immigrant patterns. It used to be that the primary source of immigrants was from the U.S., U.K., France and Australia. Those people all look like what we think Canadians look like. In today's world, though, 84% of all immigrants to Canada are racially visible—they come from Asia, Africa, and South America.

There are some studies that have been undertaken by the Conference Board and they point out that "lack of fit" of immigrants is a common complaint by organizations. What the Conference Board concluded is that we don't want things to change and that managers want to "hire like themselves". In addition, relatively few people with hiring authority are themselves racially visible.

Looking at the mix of racially visible people in the labour force, 66% participate in the labour force but only 1.7% as member of a Board of Directors and 3% in executive positions. In addition, less than half of visible minorities work in managerial positions of any kind. A lot of employers say that they don't have qualified visible minorities in their talent pool but what I am finding in my study is that employers are simply not thinking of these people as having some useful skills and solutions.

What are the challenges, then, for business? Clearly, attracting and recruiting skilled immigrants is an issue but the retention and advancement of these immigrants is also a key issue. Why is advancement important? We have a loss of talent and skills due to retirements and loss of the labour force.

There are also benefits of diversifying management staff including filling the skills gap, bringing a new lens to projects, the building of cross-cultural competencies and increased understanding of multi-cultural and international consumers.

Some examples of solutions for businesses include projects such as Hire Immigrants, funded by the Ontario Government and my project on Leadership Diversity, funded by HRSDC, which is a three year program (we are at the end of year one). Our aim is to determine at the organizational level what the barriers are that are unwittingly created at the HR level and then offer on-line training modules aimed at HR practices using animated computer games



Workshop D: Ontario Immigration Programs

Presenter: Riet Verheggen, Director, Immigration Branch, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

The attraction, settlement and integration of newcomers to Ontario is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. The federal government, through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), has overall jurisdiction for Canada's immigration programs, including selection, refugee determination and citizenship.

As Ontario receives approximately 125,000 immigrants annually (or 50% of newcomers to Canada), Ontario's goal is to optimize the benefits of immigration and support the successful integration of newcomers into society with a particular focus on jobs. The Government of Ontario is focussed on six priority areas to achieve positive outcomes:

1. Attraction Initiatives and Pre-arrival Services
2. Coordinated Settlement Services
3. A Comprehensive Language Training System
4. Labour Market Integration
5. Community and Employer Engagement
6. Addressing Labour Market needs through Immigration

The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) currently funds a series of initiatives to support the above noted priority areas. MCI provides funding for the Newcomer Settlement Program which supports the early and effective settlement of newcomers to Ontario. MCI also supports the development and delivery of language interpreter services that assist victims of domestic violence who have limited proficiency in spoken English. MCI is also funding adult, non credit, English / French as a second language classes, as well as other language based initiatives to help facilitate the integration of newcomers to Ontario.

To assist in labour market integration, MCI funds bridging projects that help qualified immigrants move quickly into the labour market without duplicating their existing training or work experience. To further support the economic integration of newcomers, the Ontario government enacted the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006 (FARPA), to help break down barriers facing internationally trained individuals (ITIs) applying for registration by requiring regulators to provide fair registration practices. Through FARPA, MCI also created Global Experience Ontario as a one-stop centre that provides a range of services to assist ITIs seeking to enter regulated professions. In addition, FARPA created the position of the Fairness Commissioner, which is responsible for monitoring and assessing the registration practices of regulatory bodies.

In November 2005, the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) was signed. It outlined the federal and provincial roles and responsibilities in immigration and integration, and recognized that local communities play an important role in the attraction and retention of newcomers. COIA commits the federal government to spend \$920M over 5 years for settlement and language training services throughout Ontario. Also, Annex F of COIA aims to engage municipalities in immigration issues pertaining to their interests. This work is currently being done by the Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC), which has

representation from CIC, MCI, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and municipalities throughout Ontario.

Ontario is committed to the successful social and economic integration of newcomers. This commitment is and will continue to be backed by a combined provincial and federal investment of \$2 billion over the five-year period, 2005-06 to 2009-10, in a range of settlement, language-training and labour-market integration programs. Ontario values diversity, and the contribution of newcomers to our society.

Workshop E: *Attracting Investors and Entrepreneurs*

Presenter: Lawrence Hynes, Manager, Business Immigration Section, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

Business immigrants can be an important source of entrepreneurial talent for a community. They bring with them capital, international business connections and a strong entrepreneurial drive. Canada's Business Immigration Program which includes the Investor, Entrepreneur and Self Employed categories allows international businesspeople to qualify for permanent residence.

To qualify as an Entrepreneur, an applicant must

- have "Business Experience",
- have a minimum personal net worth of at least \$300,000 CDN, and
- agree to meet "conditions" related to establishing a business after immigrating to Canada.

"Business experience" means that for at least 2 out of the previous 5 years, the applicant has managed and had control of a percentage of equity of a "qualifying business" that is performing at a specific level as measured by the number of employees, sales, net income and equity in the business.

To qualify as an Investor, an applicant must:

- have "business experience"
- have a net worth of at least \$800,000 CDN; and
- make an investment of \$400,000

The "business experience" definition includes managing 5 full time employees in a business for at least 2 out of the past 5 years, or meeting the definition as described under the Entrepreneur category. The investment made is fully guaranteed and will be repaid to the investor upon maturity, approximately 5 years later.

Self employed applicants must have relevant experience in cultural activities, athletics or farm management. They must also have the intention and ability to establish a business that will create employment for themselves and make a significant contribution to cultural activities or athletics, or purchase and manage a farm in Canada.

Business immigrants often have a wealth of experience running a business in their home country. In Canada, however, business practices and organization may be very different. To be

successful in business in Canada requires becoming familiar with Canadian business practices, establishing new networks, and becoming aware of local opportunities. Communities can help newcomers to connect to local networks of service providers, business associations and government offices.

Presenter: Dave Laderoute, Manager, Thunder Bay Area Team, Regional Economic Development Branch, Ministry of Northern Development and Mines

The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines works to make Northern Ontario and the provincial minerals sector, strong, healthy and prosperous. It provides northerners with access to government programs and services, and promotes a healthy business climate that encourages competitiveness and investment in Ontario. To accomplish this, the Ministry has two Divisions:

- The Mines and Minerals Division works to generate new wealth and benefits for the residents of Ontario by providing basic geological information gathering and interpretation in support of Ontario's exploration, mine development and mining sectors and the administration of Ontario's Mining Act in a fair and consistent fashion.
- The Northern Development Division delivers economic and community development programs across Northern Ontario. Through a network of field offices and government information centres, the Division coordinates access to government programs; provides business development, investment attraction and export marketing assistance; and facilitates improvements to health and social services. The Division also delivers many of the programs of Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, and is responsible for the provincial government's investment in northern highways, winter roads, rail and air transportation.

By contributing to a healthy economy in Northern Ontario, MNDM can facilitate immigration by assisting in creating a welcoming investment climate and an economic environment in which existing jobs are being sustained and new ones created. Some specific initiatives of the Ministry which support a robust and growing Northern Ontario economy include:

- The Go North Investor Program is an investment marketing and attraction program that will raise awareness of the unique business environment and capabilities in Northern Ontario. It is specifically intended to attract "anchor" investments to diversify the Northern Ontario economy and sustain and create jobs.
- The Northern Community Investment Readiness Initiative (NCIR), a component of the GO North Investor Program, assists northern communities by providing up to \$5,000 per First Nation, municipality and economic development corporation, per project, to prepare for investment. More information on the NCIR and on the GO North Investor Program is available at http://www.mndm.gov.on.ca/mndm/nordev/redb/Programs_services/go_north_e.asp .
- The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) offers a number of programs that assist in the creation of jobs, including the Enterprise North Job Creation Program, the Northern Ontario Youth Internship and Co-Op Program, the Northern

Ontario Young Entrepreneur Program, the Emerging Technology Program, the Northern Energy Program, and the Infrastructure and Community Development Program. Depending on the specific program, private and/or public sector proponents may be eligible to apply. More information is available at <http://www.nohfc.com> .

- In partnership with local municipalities, MNM coordinates and provides annual funding to seven Small Business Enterprise Centres in communities across the North. Each office is staffed by business consultants capable of advising new and start-up businesses on the key aspects of planning and start-up requirements

Workshop F: Local Immigration Initiatives

Presenter: John DeGiacomo

**Thunder Bay Newcomer Orientation Website -
www.ThunderBayNOW.com**

This Community Action project was initiated by Volunteer Thunder Bay to develop a Newcomers Welcoming Association. A Leadership Thunder Bay Community Project Team was tasked with identifying the scope of service gaps that currently exists in welcoming newcomers to Thunder Bay. Preliminary research was conducted to obtain reliable information regarding expectations, issues and realities from newcomers who have relocated to Thunder Bay in the last 3 years. A Summer Career Placement (funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) subsidized 12 weeks of employment for a student to address the research findings by creating the Newcomers Orientation Website which includes an infrastructure for an official Newcomers Club.

The Thunder Bay Newcomer Orientation Website has a basic framework that the Newcomers Club Executive can evolve based on the following proposed goal:

- *To welcome newcomers to the Thunder Bay community and help them settle their family and discover friendships in our community.*

The proposed criteria for active membership include:

- *Submitting the applicable annual membership fee for the current membership year*
- *Residing in Thunder Bay for less than 2 years prior to application for membership*

Newcomer Club meetings will be held on the third Thursday of each month from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. as done in other communities with similar clubs across the country. The first meeting will be on Thursday January 17, 2008 in the Lakehead University Faculty Lounge, where a brief presentation will be done about a potential Newcomer Club Constitution. There is no need for a parking pass and all Newcomers are welcome to park in Lot 14. If you plan to attend the first Newcomer Club meeting, please contact Mrs. Amina Abu-Bakare at 622-6276 or via asibak@tbaytel.net .

Presenters: Lynn Reid, Home Visiting Supervisor, Our Kids Count (OKC) and Hiroko Moller, Volunteer OKC

Lynn Reid:

Our Kids Count Thunder Bay, Inc. is a non profit charitable organization focused on working with families with children age six and under to promote healthy child development within a community-based program.

The Our Kids Count Creed is:

OKC Resource Centres are places where parents and children come together to:

- put children first
- support one another
- build stronger communities
- share our many talents and build on our strengths
- be positive about ourselves and each other

Everyone is welcome at OKC.

Hiroko Moller:

An active volunteer with OKC for a number of years in a variety of leadership roles, Hiroko is dedicated and committed to the community development process. As such, she took a concern she had around the apparent lack of supports for immigrant and refugee women and children to play, socialize, and share their experiences as newcomers to this city within the Academy area. Hiroko shared that she had spoken with a number of immigrant and refugee women and the feedback was that they need a place to learn about the Canadian way of parenting and Canadian nutrition. The difficulty they have is finding a program that just supports women and children. Furthermore, they shared that as immigrants they need English education such as English as a Second Language, but some people find it impossible to take any class given their cultural or religious backgrounds and beliefs.

Through her involvement at OKC, Hiroko offered her ideas around a program that would support these women and children. Her ideas were brought forward within the community development format that OKC utilizes and from there her ideas became a proposal. Within a short time, the proposal was embraced by OKC participants and staff and was put into action as an afternoon program every Tuesday. This is an insightful example of community action as a direct result of the community development process within OKC. Hiroko shared her story as follows:

I have studied International Management at the University and worked at the International Department of a company in Tokyo for ten years. I have firsthand knowledge of what it is like to be an immigrant in Thunder Bay. I am aware of the social barriers that mothers and children face as immigrants. I know what it is like to experience social isolation as a mother with a young child.

As a participant and volunteer of Our Kids Count (OKC), I knew that there may be opportunity at OKC to support immigrant mothers and children because OKC follows the community development philosophy. They listen to members of the community – they listen

to their ideas, issues and concerns and work with people to provide support within their programs.

So I decided my first step would be to bring my idea of expanding multiculturalism within the Academy Family Resource Centre. Since 2003, I have worked with OKC in expanding multiculturalism within the Academy Centre. At first, OKC participants didn't understand about international, global, or multicultural issues for women with young children. Recently, I have proposed to OKC that we focus on 'newcomers' to Thunder Bay. Over the past years, we have had a great experience with support workers at Academy site for multicultural families. Over the past years, at Academy we have learned what multiculturalism is. We accepted all different people and adapted their cultures. As well multicultural participants have learned about Canadian parenting, health, nutrition, home safety and child safety.

Recently, I brought my idea of supporting immigrant and refugee mothers and children to OKC. I talked with Lynn Reid, Volunteer Coordinator and she brought my idea to Gladys Berringer Executive Director this past October. My idea was accepted by OKC for the Academy site. I had a discussion with Academy staff and decided to offer a new program beginning November 6th/07 to support these newcomers. We have opened a "Mom and Kids Playgroup" every Tuesday afternoon from 1 to 3. This program is geared towards Immigrants and Refugees who are new to our city. If participants need a bus ride ticket, we will provide the ticket every time.

The program goal is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all our families. Parents are able to socialize and make new friends with other mothers. Children have the opportunity to interact with other children. They explore through play during craft time, language circle and child initiated activities. Coffee and tea are always available to mothers during Drop in. The group enjoys a free, nutritious snack during the program.

All families involved have access to our free Food Shelf and Clothing Closet. We also offer a Resource Library where children can borrow books to read at home. We have a prenatal nurse available to all pregnant and new moms. There is the opportunity to become involved in other programs at our centre with the childcare offered at no charge. This is a great opportunity for newcomers to build on their communication and social skills as well as share their skills, talents and knowledge with our Canadian families. This is how OKC helps build stronger communities! This is a fun and relaxing setting for all families!

Presenter: Cathy Woodbeck, Executive Director, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

The Thunder Bay Multicultural Association is primarily involved in the settlement of newcomers to Thunder Bay, serving all categories of newcomer from refugee to entrepreneur through a wide variety of programs, services and a number of committee and community projects to enhance acceptance and reduce racism in the region.

The Host Program helps adult newcomers and their children adjust to new life in Canada by matching them with a volunteer family or individual who will assist them with adjustment and adaptation.

LINC (Language instruction for Newcomers to Canada) is an English as a Second Language Instruction program for newcomers to Canada. LINC is provided to permanent residents (landed immigrant) or convention refugees 17 years and older, and is funded by the Government of Canada through Citizenship and Immigration. Thunder Bay Multicultural Association LINC School offers both full- and part-time classes to suit the needs of students, and provides instruction in eight levels (Benchmarks 1 to 7).

Newcomers who want to attend LINC Classes or LINC Home Study first must have their English language proficiency tested by a trained assessor. Thunder Bay Multicultural Association is the LINC Assessment Centre for Thunder Bay and district. LINC Home Study Newcomers in either the District of Thunder Bay or Kenora who are unable to attend regular classes may be able to study English at home through the LINC Home Study Program. The Language Bank and Interpreter Services Program provides interpreters and translators in over 40 languages, 24 hours a day for multi-lingual requests including medical, legal, social, educational and many other situations

Through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program, settlement workers provide newcomers and established immigrants with practical assistance for the challenges of life in Canada. Services include needs assessment and referral, consumer and community information, help completing government forms, and orientation/information sessions on subjects such as health, law, housing, taxation and parenting, to name a few. The Newcomer Settlement Program provides walk-in information and referral services to refugees and newcomers. Settlement workers provide newcomer refugee and immigrant families with basic settlement, orientation, and information services. Second migration families are also assisted.



Closing Plenary Session: "Next Steps - How do we Build the Bridges?"

Moderator: Dr. Linda Manning

Participants were asked to think about the sessions that they attended and what had taken away from the sessions then to discuss what they would like to see done, including what they could contribute.

1. Iain Angus, Councillor, City of Thunder Bay and Chair of NOMA's Common Voice initiative

We published a paper a year ago called "Forging the Future". One of the elements in that paper was recognition that immigration is an opportunity for us in the region. We need to do more than talk about immigration. We cannot leave this room today without establishing a steering committee that will start as being Thunder Bay based but will quickly become regionally-based that will tackle the issue of what we need to do about immigration, what research do we need, whom should we be targeted, what policy changes might be needed at the federal or provincial level. Common Voice has access to 75 cent dollars and we can seek funding for the research needs.

2. Randy Boldt, Vice President, Mercan Capital, Winnipeg

In the workshop that I participated in this morning, I was asked about cities or communities or regions that have done a very good job of collectively recruiting immigration. I have to tell you that I could not think of any. I could think of very good initiatives by companies and by provinces and countries but not of a particular city or district or region. One of the advantages of being a city of this size and a region of this discreteness is that you can get much more cohesiveness that you can get in other jurisdictions. So you have a unique and good opportunity here.

3. Scott Reid, Sault Community Career Centre, Sault Ste. Marie

I made the trip up here from Sault Ste. Marie, having worked in the immigration and employment sector for the last three years. Thunder Bay is miles ahead of us and has showcased not only what is out there but also that we need to work together as a cohesive unit to bring Northern issues to the forefront.

4. Bartolo Pilato, New Directions Workers' Resource Centre

When I was learning to speak English as a child it was very difficult because of peer pressure and the desire to fit in. We need to understand that there is the literal meaning of words and the cultural meaning of words and when you are in a mainstream school system you are supposed to conform to the system. But then the child has to shift gears when he or she goes back home and is reintegrated into their culture. We need to focus in on the children because they are our future. If we target that area, racism stands a chance of being defeated.

Also, does your project encompass small businesses? Small business does want to make a difference. Are there resources that could be extended to them or do you have any recommendations?

5. Dr. Linda Manning

Our project is aimed at small and medium sized enterprises with the idea that we will provide resources to companies. That is actually our goal.

It does sound to me, though, that youth needs to be on this committee.

6. Uli Walther, GRK Fasteners and Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

I have no problem with the committee provided there are actions coming out of it. This is very important.

Can anyone tell me how many non-public employers are attending this conference? It does not appear to be many and that is a problem that I find with the Chamber of Commerce, that we apparently are failing to bring the private sector to the table to buy into these good ideas. We need to work on that, in my opinion.

7. Liana Frenette, Thunder Bay Testing and Engineering

The announcement of the Newcomer Program is a wonderful thing for Thunder Bay. Personal reason being is that we have hired an employee to come back to Thunder Bay who is bringing his wife with him who is from Cuba. This program will be a wonderful opportunity for her to be welcomed into the community.

Regarding the question about the private sector, when you are engaging business in Thunder Bay, often small business is forgotten.

8. Dr. Manning

The Newcomers Website and club suggests that there is a cohesive group that has developed something quite useful. I think I was told that there have already been 500 hits this week. Maybe resources such as this can be used to funnel information to people but you need to remember to motivate people to go to your website.

I sat in on a couple of sessions and I found them to be spectacular. One that I was not able to attend, however, was the one presented by the immigrant panel. What did you get out of that? What tasks could we undertake in response to that?

9. Doris Rossi, North Superior Training Board

It was a great session. The panellists spoke of their own situations which is often more helpful than just statistics. The one thing I was surprised about was that there are still issues of discrimination in Thunder Bay. Having worked on this for many years with the Provincial government, I really thought that we had addressed it but it is certainly still here. When we look at the immigration that is coming into Thunder Bay, we need to work to educate private sector employers to address this.

10. Rebecca Johnson, Councillor, City of Thunder Bay

I was very pleasantly surprised to see the number of people that were actually here. I had no idea how many would be here. It's an indication of interest in this community in immigration.

The things that we are currently doing were reinforced to me and that is a good thing as well.

I think for me to come out of a day like today, I agree with Councillor Angus that it would be sad to just all leave the room and that would be the end of it. At the same time, I think we need to look at what the future should be. We need to become a City that welcomes immigrants. If we are looking to develop a strategy, how are we going to go about doing that, what are the goals and outcomes and how are we going to evaluate that? It has to be strategic and we need the right players around the table. I left at noon to go to a Diversity Thunder Bay meeting – that's a group deals with issues about diversity in our community--and I can tell you that I already applied some things that I learned this morning at that meeting.

I think the North Superior Training Board should initiate a meeting to bring the various players together to look at an immigration strategy. I would be prepared to sit at that table initially.

11. Cathy Woodbeck, Executive Director, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

Yes, of course we will be at the table, leading the charge. When I welcomed everyone this morning I said we are at the starting line. I think we have now stepped over the starting line and there are several things we need to address. The planning stage is critical. We need to have a tool, an action plan, measurable results and all the players at the table that can make things happen. So I think there may be different initiatives throughout the life of the plan but I think that everyone that was here today understands the issues a bit better now. We can now promote anti-racism and the welcoming of newcomers in our own workplaces.

There are so many arms to this octopus—business succession, attracting and retaining immigrants, supports for newcomers, small business support—but I am pleased that we have started now.

12. Peng Youlian, Peng You Tai Chi Club

I am an immigrant from China, from Beijing. For me, this is my home. I am in the mainstream of society. But many immigrants don't feel a part of this society. How can we make sure everybody can be accepted? This is very important. You need to feel you are a part of a big family. I came here in 1990, opened a couple of restaurants. Why did I keep going despite language problems? I had so much help from the seniors at the seniors' centre who helped me just like family. So that is what is so very important for new immigrants and society as a whole.

We also need to promote ourselves as a destination for immigrants. We can attract them. We are the heart of North America—the best part. We have no disasters. Thunder Bay is a unique place and we have lots to offer.

We need to make more people know about Thunder Bay. If they come here, they will love this place. Why do they come here? Retirement? Business? Searching for a job? People who immigrate here bring knowledge and money. I deal with lots of business people in China and I tell them it is a great place to work and live. They come here to visit and they love it. But when they want to immigrate here, it takes too long. So we need some special strategies—we need to be different.

13. Sara Peters, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

I learned here today that we need to celebrate successes of individuals and employers and we need to challenge ourselves regarding how this applies to what we do. Last week, I attended a staff meeting in Sudbury and I heard a speaker from the Ontario Mining Association talk about how he is looking for skilled workers. I heard here today that most immigrants are highly skilled so maybe that is something that we can look at.

14. Speaker – Not Identified

I am an immigrant to Thunder Bay and my grandmother is an immigrant to Canada. I am just curious to know how many people here today are immigrants or children or grandchildren of immigrants. Many. So I think there is a lot of experience about what it feels like to be an immigrant in the first place. We need to tap into that.

15. Bartolo Pilato, New Directions Workers' Resource Centre

The frequent comment in the outlying communities is, why would we need immigration when so many people are out of work and the mills are shutting down. So my message is, please, let's be patient. This is really good but we also need to think about what it's like to lose your job when you are a third generation mill worker and that is all you have ever known. These are good people who all of a sudden feel betrayed by the system. While we talk about moving forward, I don't think anyone here is against that but you need to understand that there will be resistance. And it will not be offered in a mean-spirited way but these people are waking up every morning wondering what will happen to them. As a region, we need to be very patient as well.

15. Marg Scott, Executive Director, North Superior Training Board

There has been a great deal of food for thought offered during this session—and indeed throughout the day. It has been a long and fruitful day. I want to assure you that many of the comments made today just in this last session are now identified in the 2008 Trends, Opportunities and Priorities Report that I have just spent the last two months writing. It is just about finished so it was wonderful to hear some of the suggestions that are not yet in the report. Rest assured they will be including the calling of the meeting and the Training Board, I am sure in partnership with the Multicultural Association, will do that. So you have our word on that. That is the joy of the local Boards. We are pretty good at bringing people to share ideas and leverage partnerships to make things happen. That's our role and our mandate so we are very pleased to do that. It has been a very emotional and information-packed day for me. I have met new people and made new friends and so I am very grateful to all of you for sharing your time, energy and wisdom.

Our Thanks

Just as a successful immigration strategy requires a team approach so does the organization of a first class Immigration Forum. We would not have achieved anything close to the outstanding event that took place on November 28 without the help of many dedicated individuals, organizations and government departments and Ministries.

First, our sincere thanks to the members of our Forum Steering Committee who brought their energy, enthusiasm and ideas to the table time after time to ensure that the theme and content of the Forum would meet the needs of all participants. Thanks to:

- Amina Abu-Bakare, Thunder Bay Newcomers Club
- Tanka Awisoka, Lakehead University
- John DeGiacomo, Lakehead University
- Steve Demmings, Thunder Bay Economic Development Commission
- Pat Forrest, Forrest Marketing + Communications (Forum Coordinator)
- Mary Kozorys, MP Ken Boshcoff's office
- Michelle Lander, North Superior Training Board
- Bonnie McNulty, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Immigration
- Marg Ogden, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Doris Rossi, North Superior Training Board
- Larry Vezina, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce
- Annemarie Wesolowski, Literacy Northwest
- Wendy Wier, Service Canada
- Cathy Woodbeck, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

Thanks, as well, to our dynamic and informative speakers who shared their knowledge and experience all of which received rave reviews from our delegates. Thank you to:

- Randy Boldt, Mercan Capital
- Alan Diner, Pilot Provincial Nominee Program
- Nadine Heaslip, Service Canada
- Kelly McGahey, Hire Immigrants Ottawa
- Ann Welsh, North Bay Newcomer Network
- Amina Abu-Bakare, Thunder Bay Newcomer Club
- Dr. Seth Agbo, Lakehead University
- Tanka Awisoka, Lakehead University
- Michelle Lander, North Superior Training Board
- Dr. Linda Manning, University of Ottawa
- Riet Verheggen, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration
- Lawrence Hynes, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
- Dave Laderoute, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
- John DeGiacomo, Lakehead University
- Lynn Reid, Our Kids Count (OKC)
- Hiroko Moller, Our Kids Count
- Cathy Woodbeck, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association
- Plus everyone who contributed to the Closing Plenary session

We also must give our thanks to our Forum sponsors, without whom this event would not have been possible. Thanks to:

- The Chronicle Journal
- Employment Ontario
- Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration
- Northern Ontario Heritage Fund
- Thunder Bay Economic Development Commission
- Thunder Bay Multicultural Association
- The Entrepreneur Centre and
- Thunder Bay Ventures

Finally, we would like to extend a sincere "thank you" to all our Forum delegates. Your enthusiastic support of this, our first Immigration Forum has been very gratifying.



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