

# **Brandon Immigrant Settlement Gap Analysis**

**Report prepared by:**

Elicia Funk

**Based on research by:**

Anisa Zehtab-Martin, M.R.D. (Candidate)

**On behalf of the Brandon Settlement Gap Analysis Steering Committee:**

Karen Fisch, Brandon Neighborhood Renewal Corporation

Doreen Cooper, Westman ESL and Settlement Services

Shannon Empson, Economic Development

Rhonda Mathers, Services Canada

Sylvia Provenski, ACC Adult Collegiate

Liz Robinson, Manitoba Labour and Immigration

John Scott, Family Services and Housing

Lyndon Bournon, Brandon Friendship Centre

## Introduction

The issue of immigration and settlement has become an increasingly pressing issue in Brandon over the past several years. In August 2003, a Search Conference was held on the topic. The findings from this conference identified a number of areas in which actions were needed, and the Brandon Interagency Committee was identified as a vehicle for raising and dealing with immigration and settlement issues. This group began to discuss steps for moving forward.

Over the next two years little progress had been accomplished on the actions identified at the conference. In April 2005 the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation initiated a meeting to revisit the suggested actions and invited other members of the Brandon Interagency Committee to participate. An ad hoc committee was struck and determined the need for a gap analysis of immigrant client needs and services available in Brandon. The settlement gap analysis was intended to outline priorities of the settlement and integration needs of the Brandon immigrant community and identify strengths and gaps in serving the immigrant population from the perspectives of service providers and immigrants.

As resources to conduct such a study were limited, the Settlement Gap Analysis Steering Committee approached Brandon University's Department of Rural Development to determine if any graduate students would be interested in taking on the project as part of a Master's thesis. In September 2005, Anisa Zehtab-Martin met with the committee to discuss how the project could meet both the needs of the group and fulfill her thesis requirements, and agreed to become the primary investigator for the project. Funding was secured from the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation's Community Projects program and from Manitoba Labour and Immigration to cover Ms. Zehtab-Martin's costs associated with conducting the research.

The Steering Committee helped to facilitate data collection and provided guidance in forming questions for key informant interviews with service providers and immigrant focus groups. Prior to interviews and focus groups, the primary investigator received an ethics certificate from Brandon University and was approved to continue with the research. All data collected remained property of the researcher to maintain confidentiality and was shared with the Steering Committee only in aggregate form.

Qualitative interview data from 20 service providers and 7 focus groups with a total of 37 immigrants and refugees currently residing in Brandon Manitoba was collected from January to March 2006. The key findings of Ms. Zehtab-Martin's research are presented in this report, which has been prepared by the Settlement Gap Analysis Steering Committee.

## ***Immigration in Brandon***

To immigrate to Canada, individuals must qualify as being in one of three categories: family class, refugee class, or economic class.

The following definitions are provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2005):

- Family class immigrants are defined as “permanent residents sponsored by a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident living in Canada who is 18 years of age or over. Family class immigrants include spouses and partners; parents and grandparents; and others”.
- Refugee class immigrants are defined as “permanent residents including government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees, refugees landed in Canada and refugee dependants i.e., dependants or refugees landed in Canada, including spouses and partners living abroad or in Canada”.
- Economic class immigrants are defined as “permanent residents selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Canada’s economy. The economic immigrant category includes skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial or territorial nominees and live-in caregivers”.

In 2004 Manitoba received 8,089 immigrants, almost double compared to 4,621 immigrants in 2002 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). Although the majority of immigrants and refugees settle in Winnipeg, in recent years more communities have benefited from immigration. According to Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Brandon was the 5th most popular settling community for immigrants in Manitoba in 2005, welcoming 178 new residents. Manitoba’s Provincial Nominee’s Program, an initiative started to satisfy human resource needs in the province, was responsible for 122 of these settlements. The five most common groups of immigrants to Brandon by country of last permanent residence were El Salvador, Republic of Korea, Ethiopia, China, and Philippines.

## **Service Provider Interviews**

Key informant interviews were conducted with persons involved in providing services to immigrants within Brandon. *The Brandon Resource Guide: Developed by the Brandon Homelessness Steering Committee Initiative* (2004) and the *Community Contact List* (2005) were used to identify key informant service providers. Prior to the key informant interviews, 27 service agencies were mailed a letter informing them of the research (Appendix A). If they were interested in participating they were asked to contact the researcher via email or phone. Due to conditions in the Brandon University Ethics Certificate, the researcher was not allowed to contact service providers directly before receiving notification of interest.

In total, twenty key informant interviews were completed. A list of the service provider organizations that participated can be found in Appendix B. Service providers were asked to share their perspectives on issues faced by immigrants, services available for immigrants in the community and challenges they face in providing services. A list of questions asked in the service provider interviews can be found in Appendix C.

## **Issues Faced by Immigrants**

When discussing the key issues faced by immigrants, service providers first indicated that in their experience the different categories of immigrants (family class, economic class, and refugee) each had different issues. The service providers interviewed indicated that the group requiring the most services from them was the Refugee Class. Family Class immigrants and Economic Class immigrants were more likely to have other resources such as family or friends who could assist with their needs. Refugee Class immigrants were identified as requiring more assistance and services, often due to their experiences in their home countries. Many times these immigrants had experienced situations such as war and famine which affected both their physical and mental health. They were also more likely to have experienced interrupted education and be illiterate in their own language, making it more difficult to access services. The Refugee Class group was characterised as being more dependant on services as well as requiring more staff time and intensity of services.

Overall, some of the key issues identified by service providers as facing immigrants were:

- Language barriers
- Employment
- Housing
- Isolation
- Accessing of services

## **Language barriers**

Language barriers was the issue most commonly identified by service providers. Lack of proficiency in the English language was an issue that affected many facets of the lives of recent immigrants, from every day activities such as shopping, to difficulties accessing needed services such as health care, to finding and maintaining employment.

The ability to access English language training was also an identified issue. English language training was desired by many immigrants and finding appropriate training was one of their key concerns as identified by the service providers. Type and level of training, as well as factors affecting the immigrant's ability to access the training such as time of day offered, transportation and childcare were key concerns.

## **Employment**

Service providers indicated that many of the immigrants they worked with had concerns relating to finding and maintaining suitable employment. Often this was related to the degree of language skills held by the individual. English language skills are needed for immigrants to communicate and function effectively their place of employment. Without a proficient level of English, many immigrants are not able to obtain even entry level jobs.

Maple Leaf Foods was perceived by service providers as a key employer of immigrants in Brandon, while employment opportunities outside of this employer were limited. As a result, many immigrants have moved from Brandon to other provinces where there is more opportunity for employment.

One service provider noted that recognition of credentials is a barrier for immigrants in finding suitable employment. Education and employment experience obtained in other countries is often not recognized by employers or educational institutes. This leads to some immigrants being underemployed compared to their skill level. Further on this issue, the service provider commented that immigrants trying to gain credential recognition had little or no support from service providers or the community.

## **Housing**

The availability of affordable housing in Brandon was another issue service providers identified as affecting recent immigrants. This issue was of a particular concern in relation to the future growth of the immigrant population in Brandon. A lack of affordable rental housing and affordable opportunities for homeownership was identified. Immigrants with large families were considered particularly affected by this issue, as affordable rental units with three or more bedrooms are limited in the community.

## **Isolation**

A number of service providers identified feelings of isolation as one of the biggest issues faced by recent immigrants. Language skills are related to this issue, as immigrants who were not comfortable with their grasp of the English language had barriers to meeting new people. Women who stayed at home with their children were considered to be particularly affected as they not only had a lack of opportunity to meet new people, they also had a lack of opportunity to use the English language.

## **Accessing of Services**

Accessing of services was one of the top issues for immigrants, according to service providers. Immigrants may face barriers to accessing services or in some cases the services they require are simply not available in the community. Barriers to accessing services are often related to language skills of the immigrants. This affects both their ability to learn of the services available as well as their ability to obtain and understand the needed information from the services. The organization of Canadian systems and institutions is a new experience for immigrants and can often be confusing. Assistance in understanding these systems is often not available.

## **Community attitude**

The degree to which the community as a whole was willing to accept and welcome immigrants was also identified as a key issue. Service providers reported that some immigrants have faced racism and discrimination in the community.

## ***Services for Immigrants***

Service providers were asked to identify what services they offered to immigrants. While several organizations indicated that all of their services were available to immigrants the services listed in this section are only those specifically targeted towards immigrants.

Eight of the twenty organizations indicated that they provided some type of English language services in the form of English literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an Additional Language (EAL) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Two organizations indicated that they offered support groups for immigrants and two organizations provided some type of employment services. Other services provided included outreach, health services and settlement services.

## **Awareness of Other Services for Immigrants**

To measure their awareness of other organizations that work with immigrants, service providers were asked to identify other services available in Brandon. This question also helped to indicate if collaboration between providers existed. While immigrants can access all services available to the public, service providers were directed to list services which have programs or services specifically directed towards immigrants.

The service organization most commonly identified by the interviewees was Westman Immigrant Services (formerly Westman ESL and Settlement Services). This organization was by far the most recognized service for immigrants in the community.

Fifteen service organizations were listed by the interviewees as providing services specific to immigrants:

- 7<sup>th</sup> Street Health Access Centre
- Assiniboine Community College (Adult Collegiate)
- Brandon Friendship Centre
- Brandon Literacy Council
- Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation

- Brandon Regional Health Authority
- Brandon School Division
- Brandon University English for Academic Purposes Program
- Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre
- Knox United Church
- Samaritan House Training Centre
- Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC)
- United Food and Commercial Workers Canada
- Westman Immigrant Services (previously named Westman ESL and Settlement Services, WESLS)
- Women's Centre

The service providers that indicated they had a partnership with other service organizations were inclined to be more aware of the different services available. While these organizations were listed as providing services to immigrants, service providers were not always aware of the exact services provided by each organization. One interviewee readily admitted that knowledge of other services was an area with which they struggled.

### ***Gaps in Services***

Service providers were asked to share their perspectives of what gaps in services existed in the community. Overall, interviewees identified that coordination of services was the major gap in service for immigrants in Brandon. Other specific gaps were identified in the following areas:

- English Classes
- Settlement Services
- Employment Assistance and
- Mental Health Services.

### **Coordination of Services**

The largest gap identified by service providers was the coordination of services. It was suggested that the service provider community as a whole is not ready to provide adequate services for immigrants to Brandon. In many cases the organizations providing services are not aware of other services for immigrants in the community. These organizations are all trying to meet the needs of the immigrants coming to them for services, but no overall plan for the community exists. This leads to duplication of some services and confusion of how and where to access services.

A number of service providers commented that there is competition amongst some service providers to receive funding for service programs. This competition creates tensions and affects some service providers' ability or willingness to work together.

While partnerships are beginning to be formed to better provide comprehensive services for immigrants and to address gaps in services, more partnerships are needed to meet the needs of a growing immigrant population.

## **English Classes**

One of the specific areas where the service providers who were interviewed identified a gap in services was English language training. This was also an area where a better coordination of services was identified as being required.

One service provider commented that the numbers of immigrants using their services are not big enough to warrant a variety of different levels of ESL and/or EAL classes. Students at a variety of skill levels and specific training needs are therefore combined into a single class. Additionally, a number of organizations in Brandon are offering English language training, further reducing the number of students in a class and putting a strain on the resources available for any one organization.

The type of English language training available was also identified as a gap. Conversation classes in particular were mentioned as being requested by immigrants. Also, English language classes specific to a particular occupation to better prepare immigrants for the workforce was identified as lacking in the community.

## **Settlement Services**

Settlement services to provide assistance to immigrants living and working in a new system in a new language was also identified as a gap. Westman Immigrant Services was identified as the main organization providing settlement services, but it was suggested that this organization was overwhelmed with work and unable to meet the full demand in the community. It was noted that Maple Leaf provides a degree of settlement services for their workers but other organizations doing foreign recruitment, such as the health care field, do not always have a settlement plan available.

## **Assistance Finding Employment**

Assistance finding employment was another gap identified by interviewees. Service providers indicated more assistance for immigrants in finding and maintaining employment was required in the community. This includes assistance for credential recognition, employment training and assistance in starting a business.

## **Counseling**

The final area identified as a gap in current services was that in the area of mental health. Culturally appropriate counseling services were considered to be limited or not existent in the community. An area of particular need that was identified was counseling services for children who had experienced war prior to immigrating to Canada.

## ***Challenges to Service Provision***

Four common issues were identified by service providers when asked to identify the challenges they faced providing services to immigrants:

- Communication issues,
- Access to funding and resources,
- Availability of services for immigrants, and
- Providing appropriate ESL/EAL or literacy training.

### **Communication issues**

Communication was the largest issue faced by service providers. Service providers identified that they often have difficulty in communicating on a daily basis with the immigrants accessing their services. This provides a challenge in understanding their clients' needs and having the clients understand the information that they are given. For example, teachers passing on information to parents about their children are unsure if the information they are trying to convey gets "lost in translation." This affects the parent's ability to participate and be involved in their child's education.

Many of service providers identified that there is a need for interpreters and translators in their field of work. However, in many cases resources are not available to hire a pool of translators and interpreters. Even when resources are available, trained interpreters are not available in the community. In some cases volunteers are used to translate information. Often these volunteers are related to the client being served, perhaps the member of the family with the best English skills. This creates another challenge, as private information is no longer private.

### **Access to Funding and Resources**

Sixteen of the twenty service providers interviewed indicated that the availability of adequate funding and resources to serve the immigrant population was a one of their challenges in providing services. Resources needed include more money, staff and time. Services are being requested on weekends and evenings in addition to regular daytime services, but agencies do not have the funding to offer services during these times. Immigrants accessing general services also sometimes require a much higher level of involvement than other clients, placing a strain on normal caseloads.

Due to the relatively small number of immigrants compared to larger cities, access to funding for programs is limited. Providing needed services for a small number of immigrants, however, often requires more funding per client than providing the same service for a large number of clients. Written resources in specific languages were often desired; however the cost of translating materials was prohibitive, particularly for languages spoken by smaller immigrant populations in the community.

One of the specific examples related to access to funding was in relation to the public school system. The Brandon School Division had 106 registered immigrant students in 2006. To be eligible for funding, students must have resided in Canada for less than two

years. After two years the school division no longer receives additional funding for the students, even though many students continue to require extra support.

### **Limited Availability of Services for Immigrants**

Service providers indicated another challenge was related to the limited availability of services in Brandon specifically for immigrants to assist them in their settlement process. In larger centres cultural groups often have their own organizations to provide support to new immigrants in their own language and from their own cultural perspective. Services for specific issues such as post traumatic stress as a result of circumstances in war torn countries are provided in larger centres that serve large populations effected by the issue. In a smaller community like Brandon these needed services just are not available. Service organizations now find that they must provide these services themselves as there is no place to refer their clients.

### **ESL/EAL and Literacy Classes**

Several service providers identified that they have challenges providing English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes. One service provider commented that the numbers of immigrants using their services are not big enough to warrant a variety of different levels of ESL and/or EAL classes. Students at a variety of skill levels and with specific training needs are therefore combined into a single class. Additionally, some students enrolled in the classes are illiterate in their own language, which makes it even more difficult to learn English skills. These students require a different kind of service.

Another service provider identified that their biggest challenge was finding ESL or EAL teachers in Brandon that were qualified to do the job.

### **Other Challenges**

Another challenge to providing services identified in the service provider interviews was that organizations are unable to accurately tell how many people need services. As Brandon is often a point of secondary migration, statistics are not available to allow services to predict the number of immigrants who will be entering the community. Therefore service providers find themselves responding to immigrant needs as new populations enter the community rather than being able to plan for these needs in advance.

One service provider identified transportation as a challenge to providing services to immigrants. The service provider commented that transportation is an issue for some immigrants who work on Sunday or go to church because the buses do not run and this is often the primary mode of transportation.

Lack of childcare was cited as a challenge for immigrants accessing services such as English classes. Organizations providing English classes often do not provide childcare. This presents a barrier to some women who do not have other childcare options that would allow them to attend classes.

## ***Service Provider Suggestions***

Respondents were asked to provide their opinion as to what needs to be done to improve services for immigrants. Suggestions included:

- Provision of information resources,
- Collaboration among service providers,
- Leadership and community support,
- Culturally appropriate services, and
- Translators and interpreters.

## **Information Resources**

Many of the service providers suggested having more information on services available to immigrants in their own language and from their own cultural perspective.

When providing information resources for immigrants, the language barrier was the main challenge that service providers wished to have addressed. They suggested having information translated into the primary languages of the clients they served. A health service provider commented “we seriously need to address patient education materials in that has been translated and interpreted properly.”

As well as having existing information translated into other languages, it was also suggested that an informational resource should be created to help immigrants understand the systems and services available in Brandon. It was suggested that this information be available in the form of a video to assist those who have low levels of literacy in their own language.

One service provider suggested that a resource list be made available for service providers to provide information on the resources available at each service organization. This would assist service providers in referring clients where to access services.

## **Coordinated Services**

Service providers indicated that one of the most important changes required is for providers to work together to coordinate services. Due to limited resources being available it was suggested that it is very important that the service provider community collaborates to make services efficient. All organizations providing services to immigrants should collaborate during both the planning and service delivery processes.

Service providers indicated that a coordinated approach to service provision would help provide better service to immigrants. The coordinated approach would help organizations work together and become aware of the different services offered in Brandon. This would minimize overlaps and gaps in service provision. One service provider commented that a coordinated approach would make their job easier as well as being beneficial to the immigrant population. With a better knowledge of other services, this would assist service providers in better informing their clients.

To help create this coordinated approach, it was suggested that it could be beneficial to have one person or organization that would serve as a resource to other service providers by providing help or guidance in relation to working with the immigrant population.

### **Leadership and Community Support**

It was suggested that to retain and better serve the immigrants living in Brandon, leadership and community support was needed. Brandon as a community needs to embrace immigration as an opportunity for community and economic growth if we truly wish to attract and retain immigrants. It was suggested that leadership needs to come from the mayor and council, declaring immigration as a desired outcome for the community.

With leadership the community would also be better able to plan for an increase in immigrants in the community, rather than reacting to an increase after the fact. This would be a preventative solution to potential issues such as lack of affordable housing and increases in crime and “ghettoizing” of the immigrant population.

It was also suggested that Manitoba Labour and Immigration should be involved in providing assistance and ensuring that appropriate services are available to immigrants, regardless of where they settle.

### **Culturally Appropriate Services**

One service provider indicated that the reason why their services are working well is because their staff has taken training related to culture and diversity. It has helped the service to be more culturally sensitive to immigrants that approach them for services. It was suggested that other services should take this type of training.

Another suggestion was to tailor some programs specifically to meet the needs of the immigrant population. For example, the 7<sup>th</sup> Street Health Access Centre created a culturally sensitive cervical cancer screening clinic. Among a number of immigrant populations cervical screening is not a common health practice and a new approach was required. An interpreter was also available for the day and the clinic was quite successful.

It was also suggested that it was important to hire immigrants as staff, to learn about the immigrant’s culture as well as provide employment to immigrants.

One method of determining if services are culturally appropriate that was suggested in the interviews was to conduct a program review. The input and feedback for the service organization would be provided by the immigrant population. This would identify potential barriers that are not readily apparent “because for us to look through our ethnocentric eyes we look very accessible and appropriate.”

### **Translators/ Interpreters**

Having a pool of trained translators and interpreters available in the community was another recommendation of service providers. Having a list of qualified people would allow a variety of service providers to access this resource. It was important that these individuals be trained, especially to deal with confidential information.

## **Other**

Two of the service providers commented that the reason their services were well attended was because they provided transportation for participants. This allowed the service to be more accessible to the more vulnerable, at risk families in the community. They suggested this to other organizations serving the same population.

Another suggestion was to provide mentoring to immigrants that have come to Brandon to start a business. This would provide information on how to set up a business, the people they need to talk to, and legal procedures that are applicable to their situation.

Recruiting additional qualified service staff to meet the needs of the immigrant population was the final suggestion from the service provider interviews.

## Immigrant Focus Groups

Seven focus groups were held with a total of 37 immigrants. The focus groups were conducted at service organizations and were organized by language spoken. Service providers contacted the immigrants through their own contact lists and encouraged them to participate. The immigrants were assured that non-participation would have no impact on current or future service provision and information shared at the focus group would be kept confidential by the researcher.

Prior to each focus group a translator was contracted to interpret and translate a consent letter (Appendix D) into the appropriate language: Amharic, Korean, Spanish and Mandarin (Chinese). Translators were also available to help translate for the participants and the researcher during the focus group. Each translator signed an oath of confidentiality prior to the focus group.

A short questionnaire was used to gather demographic information on the participants. Data tables of the demographic information can be found in Appendix E. Twenty-two of the 37 participants (59%) were female, 13 of the 37 participants (35%) were male and two participants did not complete the questionnaire. Most of the participants (31 of 37, 84%) were between the ages of 20 and 44 and were married (25, 68%).

Participants were asked to identify themselves as Economic Class, Family Class or Refugee Class, however a large number of participants (15 of 37, 41%) classified themselves as “other” or did not identify a category, suggesting that either the question was not understood, or that the categories were not ones used by the immigrants themselves. Those who chose “other” identified themselves by the classes of “landed immigrant,” “independent immigrant,” or “permanent resident.”

Participants represented nine different countries of last permanent residence. The most common countries listed were Mexico (8 of 37), Ethiopia (8 of 37), South Korea (5 of 37) and Sudan (5 of 37). The results are not similar to percentages provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada for Brandon in 2005, which identified the top four countries of last permanent residence as El Salvador, Republic of Korea, South Africa and China. The difference may possibly reflect secondary migration trends or may be a result of higher participation by groups using the service organizations through which the focus groups were arranged.

Most participants (34 of 37, 92%) had lived in Brandon four years or less, and almost two-thirds of participants (23 of 37, 62%) had lived in Brandon for a period of two years or less.

Limitations of this focus group research include the relatively small sample size compared to the number of immigrants in Brandon. The sample also may not be representative of the different categories of immigrants in Brandon or the countries of origin of immigrants; therefore information has not been broken down by immigration category. As the focus group participants were in most part identified by service providers, a limitation of the research is that it may not accurately reflect the needs or perspectives of immigrants who have not accessed services. These limitations should be taken into account when considering the results in this section.

While all focus group participants were asked the same six questions (Appendix F), the focus groups often took on a conversation-like quality and therefore the results presented in this section have been gathered from the answers to more than one question.

### ***Immigrant Concerns and Challenges***

Focus group participants were asked to identify the concerns they had when they first came to Brandon. They were also asked to describe what their experiences were like using services in Brandon. This question identified a number of the challenges faced by the immigrants.

#### **Communication**

The most common concern listed by focus group participants was being able to communicate in English. Not knowing the language made it difficult to communicate with people in the community and impacted everyday activities such as grocery shopping as well as accessing needed services. It also made it difficult to make new friends and acquaintances. The language barrier was also a concern in finding employment.

#### **Employment**

Finding employment was a concern to many of the participants. Language was one barrier to finding employment. Another barrier was that education and experience in their home country was not always recognized by potential employers. Although they may be very qualified in their chosen fields, sometimes holding Masters and Doctorate degrees, some participants felt that they were not given an equal opportunity with local people and this led to many immigrants being unemployed or underemployed.

Some participants indicated that Maple Leaf was the only organization that would hire an individual with little or no English on a full-time basis. It was noted that working at Maple Leaf is a physically difficult job and not all individuals are suited for this type of work. Full-time employment outside of this employer was felt to be limited in the community. It was also noted that not all immigrants can find employment with this employer.

#### **Weather**

Another concern that was cited by many immigrants was the weather. All immigrants who participated in the focus groups had come from countries with much warmer weather. It was a huge adjustment for some of the immigrants to survive their first winter.

#### **Culture**

Cultural differences were also a concern when first arriving in Brandon. Things such as food, finding ingredients for ethnic dishes, and the way people socialize in their home countries were all aspects of culture that were missed. Some participants indicated having “culture shock” when they moved to Canada.

An important part of culture was the way children are raised in Canada. Some participants expressed that they wished to raise their children the way they did in their countries of origin. However, some customs such as spanking children were at odds with

laws and customs in Canada. The differences in these customs created tensions within households. Some immigrants felt that their children had changed since moving to Canada and were no longer as respectful of their elders.

Differences in culture such as holidays and school events were also a concern. While many immigrants expressed an appreciation that their children were able to participate in a variety of school activities, they did not always understand what the events and cultural occasions represented. With no one to explain the events, they were often unsure if their children should participate in activities.

Differences in religion and not understanding Canadian systems were also culture related concerns immigrants had when moving to the community. In one focus group, the concern was raised that in Canada they were expected to work on Sundays, but according to their culture this is a day for family and religion.

## **Housing**

Housing was mentioned as one of the main concerns when moving to the community in three of the focus groups. It was a challenge to find appropriate and affordable rental accommodation. It was also noted that on top of the cost of rent, utilities were also quite expensive.

## **Accessing services**

Focus group participants indicated that they did not always know where to go to access services or what services were available in the community. This was one of their concerns when first moving to the community. The services and systems in Brandon were often quite different than those in their home countries, which provided a challenge to their day to day activities such as banking and shopping.

Another issue raised was the quality and quantity of services available. One participant commented that a few years ago enough service providers were available for the amount of immigrants in the community. However, with the recent influx of different immigrant groups there is a growing need for services. The size of and number of employees available at some organizations are not sufficient for all immigrants to get the level of service they require.

Hours of operation were also a concern. For example, one participant had a difficult time accessing English language training because their work schedule conflicted with the service organizations' times of operation.

## **Child care**

Several concerns related to childcare were mentioned by focus group participants. It was indicated that daycare services are difficult to find in Brandon as there seems to be a lack of qualified service providers. Part-time spots were considered to be particularly hard to find. It was also noted that it was very expensive to have children in daycare.

Another concern was related to culture. In some cultures, children are not placed in daycare as children are either taken care of by their mother or by relatives. Immigrants indicated that they felt they could not afford to provide for their children if the mother

stayed home, and that they were living far from any relatives who could care for their children.

## **Transportation**

Transportation was another concern brought forward during the focus groups. Many immigrants use the bus as their primary source of transportation. The frequency of bus services was a concern, as was the hours of bus operation. In particular, Sunday bus service was requested for getting to work and to church. To get anywhere on Sundays, immigrants indicated that they took taxis which were very expensive.

## **Other**

It was indicated that in general a move to one country from another is stressful. Finding a place to live, finding employment and learning how to get around in new community were all concerns on top of learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture. Everyday activities such as using debit cards and riding the bus were new challenges as the systems in Canada were completely new for many immigrants.

Another concern when coming to the community was the education of their children. Participants noted that the education curriculum from their home country was very different than the one in Canada and they hoped that their children would benefit from the new education system. They were also concerned that their children may encounter discrimination and be treated differently by the other children.

Isolation, depression and inequality were other concerns listed by focus group participants.

## ***Services Accessed***

Focus group participants were asked to identify what organizations helped them when they first arrived in Brandon. Most respondents indicated that other immigrants, whether they be family or friends were the ones to provide the most assistance to them when they moved to Brandon. Help was provided in all areas of their settlement.

Westman Immigrant Services was mentioned in all seven focus groups as an organization that assisted when they first arrived in Brandon. They provided settlement services as well as English services to new arrivals. They also matched some immigrants up with a volunteer Canadian friend who provided assistance.

Churches were also mentioned as organizations that provided assistance to new immigrants in the community. Churches helped new immigrants settle by providing needed items such as furniture and also provided a place of worship.

Focus group participants were also asked to identify other services they had used in Brandon since they arrived. However, all respondents had a difficult time answering this question, possibly due to not understanding what was meant by services. English as a Second Language classes, literacy classes, health services and support groups were mentioned by focus group participants.

## ***Retention Factors***

Focus group participants were asked if they planned to remain in Brandon and provided a number of factors that would influence their decision.

The size of Brandon was one of the reasons immigrants came to and remained in the community. It was noted that Brandon is small enough for them to understand where most things are and to learn about the different services. It was also commented that Brandon is a safe community to raise children. Another factor mentioned was the variety of extra curricular activities available for children in the community.

Employment was the most important deciding factor of whether or not to stay in Brandon. Many immigrants indicated that the reason they would move from the community was to find employment. One immigrant indicated that more business opportunities were available for them in Brandon as compared to Winnipeg, and this was the reason their family had moved to the community.

Another factor that focus group participants cited as a reason they would leave Brandon was the small size of their particular cultural group in the community. In larger centres with more immigrants it was easier to access culturally appropriate services as well as to feel more at home within their own cultural group.

Lack of affordable housing was the final factor listed as a reason they may leave the community.

## ***Immigrant Suggestions***

Throughout the focus groups immigrants provided suggestions on changes that would be helpful in their settlement process. These suggestions included:

- Providing informational resources;
- Having a centralized liaison person;
- Changes to language training opportunities;
- Credential recognition assistance;
- Translation/interpretation services; and
- Increasing staffing for immigrant services.

## **Information resources**

One of the suggestions given at the focus groups was to have practical information available to new immigrants on “how to live in Brandon.” This resource could include basic information such as how the banking system works and information on transportation.

It was also suggested that seminars could be held to inform new immigrants about Canadian systems. It was important that the information provided be culturally sensitive and not just from the perspective of Westerners.

## **Centralized liaison**

Another suggestion was to have a centralized liaison that immigrants could go to for assistance. This person should be a permanent employee funded by the government, not a volunteer position. This would allow immigrants to know where to go as a first step when moving to Brandon. This liaison would be educated on the services available in Brandon to be able to provide referrals to other services where appropriate.

## **Language training changes**

A suggestion made by one immigrant was to have English services at the place of employment so that immigrants both have opportunities to learn the language and to be employed. In particular, the language specific to that type of employment would be learned. It was noted that it was very difficult to work and learn English at the same time, largely due to when and where English classes were offered.

Other suggestions for changes were to have more courses at different skill levels, rather than large general classes. It was also suggested that classes should be held more often or for longer periods of time (all day courses). More opportunities for conversation classes were also suggested.

## **Credential recognition assistance**

During one focus group, the topic of credential recognition was raised. It was suggested that the Canadian government should have a system in place to better recognize these qualifications. Better recognition of foreign credentials could help eliminate the current waste of human resources and talents of skilled and educated immigrants who cannot work in their area of expertise due to their credentials not being recognized in Canada.

## **Translation/interpretation**

It was suggested that more translation and interpretation services should be available to assist new immigrants in accessing services. Health services in particular were singled out as needing these services. One focus group participant commented that some immigrants would prefer not to go to the doctor when they are sick because of potential misunderstandings between themselves and the health care practitioner.

## **Increase in staffing**

The last suggestion from the focus groups was that staffing for immigrant related services should be increased. The quantity and quality of current services was not considered to be sufficient to meet the level of need in the community.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the research indicated that several gaps exist in current services for recent immigrants. Coordination of services, specifically in the areas of settlement, language training and assistance finding employment, is crucial given the limited availability of funding and resources in the community. Communication issues must also be addressed to ensure that the information exchanged between new immigrants and service providers is accurate and understood by both parties. A pool of translators or having information available in print or video in a variety of languages would help address communication

needs. Large scale issues such as employment, housing and daycare also must be addressed if the community wishes to see the attraction and retention of immigrants in the long term.



## **Appendix B: Service Organizations that Participated in Key Informant Interviews**

7<sup>th</sup> Street Health Access Centre  
Assiniboine Community College  
Assiniboine Community College Adult Collegiate  
Brandon Employment Centre – Advanced Education Training  
Brandon Friendship Centre  
Brandon Literacy Council  
Brandon Race Relations Network  
Brandon Regional Health Authority  
Brandon School Division  
Brandon University International Students Organization  
Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba  
City of Brandon  
EAL/ESL teachers from Brandon School Division  
Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre  
Samaritan House Training Centre  
Samaritan House Resource Centre  
Sexuality Education Resource Centre  
Women’s Centre  
World University Services Canada

## **Appendix C: Service Provider Questions**

1. What services does your organization provide to recent immigrants in Brandon?
2. What immigrant groups have approached your organization for services? Are the issues different for different groups?
3. What current challenges are you experiencing in providing services to immigrants?
4. What would assist your organization to better provide services to immigrants?
5. What issues do immigrants face in Brandon?
6. What other services for immigrants are you aware of?
7. In your experience what services are working well in Brandon? What are the challenges or gaps?
8. In your opinion what needs to be done to improve services for immigrants?

## Appendix D: Consent Letter for Focus Group Participants

You are being asked to participate voluntarily in a research project entitled *Immigration Analysis: Service Needs of Rural Immigrants* that is being organized by Anisa Zehtab-Martin a student in the Masters of Rural Development program (MRD) at Brandon University.

The aims of the study are:

- Examine the service needs and accessibility to public services of current immigrant residents
- Identify strengths and gaps in the current service provision to the immigrant population from the perspectives of service providers and immigrants.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in focus groups where the group will be asked a number of questions for the purpose of gathering their opinions regarding their experiences in accessing recent public services in Brandon. I anticipate that the interview will take no more than one and a half hours. Please be advised that you do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with and that you may change your answers or withdraw from the study at any time. What we discuss here today will be kept anonymous and only I will be aware of your identity.

Please do not discuss the details of the discussion or the responses of any of the individual participants after you leave here today. Pseudonyms may be used in describing the stories, with exact details of the stories being altered to ensure anonymity.

The potential benefits of participating in this study may be improved service provision for future immigrants in Brandon. A written final report will be available to the service providers, to share and use in their planning of programs.

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Brandon University. If you have any questions or concern about the project itself or the methods used, please contact my advisor Dr. Ken Beesley at 571-8517 or Anisa Zehtab-Martin at the phone number or email address below.

Sincerely,

Anisa Zehtab-Martin

Brandon University

(204) 571-8553      [zehtaba@brandonu.ca](mailto:zehtaba@brandonu.ca)

I have read or had read to me, and understood the contents of this consent form. I agree to participate in this discussion group and the study:      \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

I have agreed to have the interview audio taped:      \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

Participants Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Demographics of Focus Group Participants

### Gender

	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	13	35.2%
Female	22	59.4%
Unidentified	2	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Age Category

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
15-19	1	2.7%
20-29	8	21.6%
30-34	6	16.2%
35-39	9	24.4%
40-44	8	21.6%
45-49	1	2.7%
50-54	1	2.7%
55+	1	2.7%
Unidentified	2	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Marital Status

Marital Status	Number	Percentage (%)
Married	25	67.5%
Single	4	10.9%
Separated	2	5.4%
Divorced	2	5.4%
Unidentified	4	10.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Immigrant Class

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Refugee Class	8	21.6%
Family Class	7	18.9%
Economic Class	7	18.9%
Other	9	24.3%
Unidentified	6	16.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Country of Last Permanent Residence

Country	Number	Percentage (%)
Ethiopia	8	21.6%
Mexico	8	21.6%
South Korea	5	13.5%
Sudan	5	13.5%
China	3	8.1%
El Salvador	2	5.4%
Eritrea	2	5.4%
Kenya	2	5.4%
Japan	1	2.7%
Unidentified	1	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Length of Time Living in Brandon

Years	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 1	9	24.3%
1	4	10.8%
2	10	27.0%
3	6	16.2%
4	5	13.5%
5	0	0.0%
6	2	5.4%
No Response	1	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Appendix F: Immigrant Focus Group Questions**

1. How long have you lived in Brandon?
2. What were your concerns when you first came to Brandon?
3. What organizations helped you when you first arrived?
4. What other services have you used?
5. What was your experience like using these services?
6. Do you plan to stay in Brandon?

### **Demographic information questionnaire:**

Age:

Gender:

Marital Status:

Number of Children:

Year of arrival in Canada:

Original country of departure:

Additional country (countries) of residence prior to Canada:

First community of residence in Canada: