

BRANDON, MANITOBA

The newcomer population in Brandon had grown rapidly due to a provincial government program to attract more skilled workers. A meat packing plant has used this program to bring in international workers. About 95% of the temporary workers who come to Brandon through this program decide to apply for permanent resident status in Canada. The city is now one of the four main newcomer destinations in Manitoba and has been transformed into a multicultural prairie community. Newcomer source countries include East Germany, Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, El Salvador, Columbia, and China, with additional groups from Mauritius and Georgia expected soon. Under the *Welcome Here* project, the **Elsbeth Reid Family Resource Centre**¹ and **Westman Immigrant Services**² decided to offer a combined family literacy and adult language training program as well as community orientation sessions for newcomer families.

Activities

The project team

- delivered a ten-week English language and family literacy program for parents and children (Activities for parents: English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes with child care support. Activities for parents and children: Family literacy activities based on themes and concepts such as: numbers and counting; winter and snow; the public library; movement games; the importance of music and books; and body awareness)
- worked with a local church in order to offer the program in participants' neighbourhood
- offered newcomers an orientation to community facilities including the public library
- conducted a post-program survey to learn about participants' experiences and their suggestions for future programming.

Project Results

- The project team held 19 program sessions in ten weeks
- 18 families participated in program activities
- Participants made connections to project team staff that helped the participants to improve their language skills and to address family and settlement issues
- Families developed friendships and made connections in the community
- Families became more aware of settlement services in the community
- Participants had the opportunity to reduce their isolation and talk with other families about issues they faced
- Parents and children had fun together while learning English

Successes & Challenges

Successes

- Project team staff worked well together and were able to build on each other's expertise
- The team hired child care staff who spoke the first languages of participants
- The team paid for families' transportation costs to encourage families to attend the program in cold winter months
- Child care staff helped with outreach activities (i.e. providing translation and arranging transportation)
- The local church provided space for the program and the staff were very supportive
- Staff and volunteers from other community-based organizations provided support during the project
- The post-program survey helped the team to learn about participants' experiences in the program and their ideas for program changes
- The survey was conducted in the participants' first language
- The project team used a continuous intake process to ensure as many families as possible were able to participate in the project

Challenges

- Weather was a barrier for some families who were adjusting to their first Canadian winter; they were hesitant to attend the program in poor weather
- Some parents could not participate in the whole program because their parental benefits ended and they returned to work
- Staff did not expect certain cultural challenges that impacted families' participation (i.e. some families had different meal preparation routines which overlapped with the program schedule; some participants expected more structured programming with children and additional time in the language class)

Longer-Term Impacts

- The project team will continue the program for another ten weeks with a grant from a financial institution
- A community steering committee will provide direction about securing long-term funding for program
- A local school offered space for future programming
- The project team seek funding to offer family literacy programming in different neighbourhoods
- The provincial government will fund English as an Additional Language programming and child care for the program

¹ Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre - www.cfswestern.mb.ca/elspeth.htm

² Westman Immigrant Services - www.wesls.com