

IMMIGRANT WOMEN SERVICES OTTAWA OTTAWA, ONTARIO

“If you feel happy inside you can face the challenges outside. It is important for the family to work as a team and to support each other as they make changes to their lives in Canada.”

Participant, Parents Focus Group Ottawa

Immigrant Women Services Ottawa specializes in providing crisis intervention, individual and group counselling, services for children who witness violence, information and referral services, employment services and language and interpretation services. The *Welcome Here* team worked in collaboration with Immigrant Women Services Ottawa to conduct two focus groups: one with immigrant parents (12 participants) and one with practitioners who work with immigrant families (19 participants).

Welcome Signs that Immigrant Families Experienced In Ottawa

- “Having wage subsidy and affordable home daycare makes me feel welcome.”
- “People are generally friendly at the front desks. They often greet you with a smile and ask how they can help.”
- Access to interpreter
- Availability of home day care
- Child Care drop-in to attend classes or activity. There is not a need to make an appointment. The service is readily and easily available
- Clean environments
- Computer training for women
- Discount for low income families
- French language spoken at reception
- Happy pictures of families
- Information about employment
- Language tutoring at home
- Meeting professional staff
- Pictures of mother and child playing which motivated me to play baseball with my son
- Pre-employment workshops
- Representatives of various ethnic groups within organizations they visit
- Well-baby visits

Challenges Faced By Immigrant Families:

- Difficulty in finding employment in a professional field or to choose a different career path
- Difficulty in understanding the needs of demanding young children and how to cope with them
- Overwhelmed with trying to do everything at once, not being able to settle properly and coping with all the things that demand attention
- Single parents expressed concern and fear about raising children alone.
- The lack of access to information in a quick and timely manner: “It is hard to do the right thing at the right time when you don’t have all the information.”
- Uncertain about the future –“it is hard to see beyond today”.

Challenges Faced By Practitioners:

- Difficulty gaining the confidence of immigrant families
- Inability to provide services on evenings and weekends
- Lack of coordination and collaboration with other community agencies/organizations
- Lack of easily viability of translated resources
- Lack of funding, lack of space
- Lack of staff training to work with immigrant families
- Language and communication barriers
- Location
- Overlap with programs offered by other community serving agencies
- Staff training issues

OTTAWA WELCOME PLAN

Proposed by Immigrant Families and Practitioners

Access to Information

- An Information Centre at the Airport for new immigrants where a short orientation or information could be given upon arrival in Ottawa
- Compile a list of services and community programs which are easily accessible
- Create a road map for service providers and for newcomer families to help them understand the system and how to access services.
- Having an orientation session that tells you about everything in one spot. This session could be done within the first two weeks of arriving in Canada. Some of the information that needs to be given includes: Health care information (OHIP, how to access a doctors), information to obtain SIN number, banking information, housing, child care and child support, community connections with your own culture, connection to Host program, orientation on how to get the best deals for your budget such as food, clothing.
- Promote services available to newcomer families through multi cultural liaison officers, local doctor offices, health care centres, schools, clinics, Canadian Embassies, taxi drivers, immigration lawyers, Airport Information Centres, websites
- Some of the key elements of the road map should include language, housing, food, health care, employment, recreation, spiritual, places of worship.

Access to Education/Training/Support Services

- Create a list of Do's and Don'ts around family life, child abuse, partner abuse, culturally accepted norms, how to be assertive, asking for what you want, understanding your rights as an individual for immigrant families so that they understand culture and avoid getting into trouble with the law
- Ensure that there are components of your program that "touch" immigrant families personally/culturally
- Have a combination of programs for children and parents of children aged 6 – 12 years. There could be both combined programs for boys and girls as well as individual programs to serve the needs and interest of boys and girls separately
- Provide training to equip staff to deal with multi cultural groups and ensure that services are accessible.

Mentorship/Volunteering/Host Programs

- Create partnership with other service providers within the community and encourage partnerships through volunteering.
- Have a point of contact such as a Family Centre based on region in the city

Practitioners Best Practices When Working With Immigrant Families

- Access to interpretation services
- Available childcare
- Create multi-cultural events such as Christmas parties, rent a space in the park, celebrate the Chinese New year
- Create partnerships. One example is that the Immigrant Women Services created a partnership with ISISTERS and now they are offering a computer training program for immigrant women to help them gain computer skills.
- Create programs and services by collecting feedback/evaluations from newcomer families
- Cultural sensitivity/Awareness training for staff
- Deliver programs to target specific groups by language or culture. One example is that the Pinecrest Queensway provides specific programs to the Somali community because there is a large concentration of people from that culture in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Employ diverse staffs which reflects various cultures
- Establish a main point of contact for the family. This could be in the form of a Information Resource Co-coordinator or resource contact/ liaison or mentor, host cross agency fairs to expand the knowledge of programs/services being provided by various agencies that work with newcomers
- Host programs - match newcomer families with Canadian born families
- Provide a wide variety of services to make everyone in the family feel welcome such as counselling, youth services, services for seniors, multicultural programs, outdoor activities, ESL classes, interpretation services, referrals etc.
- Settlement workers follow clients for an extended period of time to create a circle of support
- Signs in various languages, display pictures, artwork, symbols, books, puzzles, that represents clients backgrounds and experiences
- The Incredible Directory is a comprehensive collection of a list of all agencies in the Ottawa areas. It is very useful in helping to make referrals to other community programs.