

CHANCES FAMILY CENTRE Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

"We need to learn about other cultures – not only for them to learn about our culture... we all need to share the world in a mutually supportive way"

"There is a fundamental disconnect between the needs of immigrant communities and what the mainstream communities would like us to do... cultures, traditional norms may not be the same and does not need to be westernized"

- Participant, Parents Focus Group
Charlottetown, PEI

The CHANCES Family Centre in Charlottetown specializes in providing family programs to the community. CHANCES provide drop-in programs, child care, parenting programs, pre-natal programs, home visiting and Junior Kindergarten. The *Welcome Here* team worked in collaboration with the CHANCES Family Centre and conducted two focus groups: one with immigrant families (14 participants) and one with practitioners who work with immigrant families (15 participants).

Welcome signs that immigrant families have experienced in Charlottetown

- "Children's recreational areas are comfortable; teachers are careful and show concern about children's welfare"
- "Everyone is warm and friendly and greets you with a smile"
- "Facilities for programs are well designed"
- "People are helpful, provide very good service and have a good attitude"
- "There are a variety of goods available in the stores that cater to various cultures"
- "There is access to interpretation and translation services (even though it is not always available)"

Challenges faced by immigrant families

- Closure of child care centres and schools during snow storms (schools were closed for 21 days during winter 2008). This puts pressure on working parents to alternative child care arrangements. Parents are also concerned about school closures affecting the quality of their children's education.
- Difficulty in planning next steps in Canada
- Difficulty in upgrading education and identifying areas of study suitable to the PEI economy.
- Insufficient ESL/ EAL classes. Wait lists are 2 – 4 months long.
- Lack of a clear map which provides information about available resources and community services.
- Lack of access to information in their own language for things such as community activities, parenting programs, taxes, employment, host programs, etc.
- Lack of opportunities to secure employment.
- Language and communication barriers.

Challenges faced by Practitioners

- Difficulty getting access to funding for interpretation for immigrant families experiencing mental health issues
- Difficulty getting access to translation/interpretation services on a day to day basis. Translation becomes a huge issue especially around health/safety issues and matters which are urgent.
- Difficulties in continuity of service since less than 10% of population are immigrants. Services see immigrants sporadically and sometimes are unable to follow up.
- Disconnect between what immigrant families need versus what organizations are providing.
- Inability to provide services on weekends and evenings.
- Insufficient information on culture, norms, traditions to help practitioners understand immigrant families in a better way.
- Lack of funding and training to support initiatives for immigrant families and to respond to their needs.
- Language and communication barriers.
- No continuum for services/support to pick up from where another service provider left.
- Overlap with programs and lack of coordination and collaboration between community agencies

Program and training needs identified by practitioners

- Access to a list of local community resources for referral purposes as well as knowledge of relevant local, provincial and federal legislation to help immigrant families
- Access to interpreters and translated material
- Awareness and deeper understanding of the culture and background of immigrant families
- Awareness of programs available to immigrant families in their own languages
- Training in cross cultural communication, counseling, dealing with post traumatic stress, discrimination and racism and helping immigrant families plan their lives

Activity results and longer-term impacts

- Families indicated an interest in participating in more activities within the community. There is a need for an ongoing means of communication among stakeholders.
- Practitioners expressed their main program and training needs. If followed upon, this will provide a useful opportunity for continuity and to fill gaps within the community.
- The 'PEI Welcome Plan' provides very tangible ideas some of which can be quickly put into operation.
- The focus groups were successfully conducted in Charlottetown. Both parents and practitioners were thrilled to get the opportunity to get together to have a dialogue about making programs in the community a more welcoming place for immigrant families.
- The resource kits provided by **FRP Canada's Welcome Here** project increased practitioners' knowledge of the resources and services available to them. Practitioners working with immigrant families will now be able use the website and resources available to help immigrant families.

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Best Practices for working with Immigrant families shared by Practitioners

- Show case immigrants culture: At a teachers' conference, the Immigrant community was invited to showcase a "Global Village" where they represented their various cultures, art forms, food etc. This was highly successful and educational for the teachers . Another initiative increased school wide awareness of immigrant students and their origin by creating a collage of maps and photos in the hallways at school
- Become friends with immigrants and an ambassador for their needs: This builds trust so that immigrant families feel safe.
- Celebration of holidays: One community program had a great Christmas party and many immigrant families participated.
- Home visits: They are a positive way of helping families. They provide the opportunity to know the family better and respond to their needs.
- Modify programs to meet the needs of the individual or family: One example is the hospital which accommodated a woman's desire to give birth on the floor. Her fear of the hospital environment was compounded by her inability to communicate in English. Respecting her wishes made the experience more positive both for the woman and the practitioners around her.
- Walk the journey with immigrant families from hopelessness to hope: It is very rewarding to experience the growth of immigrant families as they adapt to the community. For example, someone coming into PEI with no English language skills and then being able to communicate in English a year later.
- Provide alternatives to support families in crisis: One practitioner from the youth justice system revealed that he took the effort to visit affected families, understand their cultural background and allowed them to be part of the solution when their children got into trouble with the law.
- Support immigrant families through education
- Recognize the similarities underneath the differences: When one practitioner spent time with an immigrant family, he realized it was similar to the way that his family functioned.
- "One Stop" access to service for the immigrant family: A place where all their questions and needs can be addressed. There is already a provincial initiative to build a reception house to welcome new immigrants.
- Help immigrant families discover the gems of resources available in the community that cost very little.
- Attend programs that facilitate bridging of cultures: One practitioner felt that he better understood and connected with Islamic women after attending a Growth Development Program.

PEI “Welcome Plan”
Proposed by Immigrant Families and Practitioners

Access to Information

- Coordinate community services to avoid overlap
- Create a community newsletter to keep everyone informed of what is going on in the community
- Create a list of all available community resources and a “Guide Tree” to help immigrant families and practitioners have easy access to community services, resources and organizations
- Create information sharing clubs
- Greater access to the medical system such as reducing wait times at the hospital (currently 4 – 6 hours)
- Individualized packages of information for individual families
- Information about the tax system for immigrants
- Translation of documents in various languages such as information about holidays, flu shots, medical system, taxes, culture, lifestyle, etc.
- Welcome Centre with centralized services for housing, language training and assessment, parenting education, etc.

Education, Training /Support Services

- After school homework clubs for all ages
- Child care and easy access to recreational activities (Children 12 years and under should have the same opportunities as those under 5 years of age)
- Cultural sensitivity workshops, programs for immigrant families, practitioners and residents of the community)
- Parenting workshops and guidance – parenting “do’s and don’ts”
- Zoos, museums, libraries, etc. where children can learn about nature

Language Interpretation and Translation

- Create more spaces and programs for ESL/ EAL classes
- Easy access to multi-language services

Mentorship/Volunteering/Host Programs

- Increase opportunities with the Host Program. Some families have been waiting for over 2 years to be paired with a family. Create opportunities for newcomer immigrants to be mentored by immigrants who have been here for a long time
- Mentorship/sponsorship for families with similar backgrounds in culture or profession for immigrant families
- Pair newcomer families with local families or other volunteers to help with language and culture and to establish friendships

Welcoming Spaces and Cultural Diversity

- Create welcoming spaces which cater to multi-generational and family oriented activities
- Low cost or no cost recreational programs for multi-generation groups which should include sports such as soccer, arts programs and activities for social interaction (not just hockey and basketball)
- Provide opportunities to celebrate and observe cultural diversity and cultural sharing such as Christmas parties, cultural evenings and a “global village” at special events in the community

Beyond Family Resource Programs

- Access to documents such as yearly budget for PEI, Working Plans for the community etc.
- Establish an organization funded by government to act as a medium to broadcast community activities such as jobs, information, news etc, in various languages