



the *f*ACTivist

70th Anniversary Volume

IMMIGRANT ISSUES edition Winter 2010

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The Diverse Experiences & Challenges of Immigrants

By JON BOL, MacEwan Social Work Practicum Student, Edmonton Social Planning Council

New immigrants and refugees face multiple challenges and barriers when they arrive in their new cities of resettlement. These challenges can have significant psychological and physical impacts on new Canadians and their families.

However, there are four distinct "classes" of newcomers, each of which may have a different experience depending upon their economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. The four classifications of newcomers are:

1. **Refugee class:** includes people who seek refuge from persecution in their home countries (for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, etc.). Refugees need more support than other immigrant classes, as most of them come to Canada with empty hands (especially those arriving from refugee camps outside their home countries).
2. **Economic class:** includes skilled workers or professionals, business owners, and entrepreneurs who have higher economic status (upper or middle class) in their countries of origin.
3. **Family class:** includes people who may be sponsored by relatives or those who have lived in Canada for a long period of time and will provide economic and personal support to their family.
4. **Temporary foreign worker class:** includes workers brought by companies to work in Canada for at least one to two years.

Refugees, economic and family class immigrants are given permanent residency in Canada with the right to eventually become citizens. Temporary foreign workers are not granted permanent residency. However, all of the above classes of newcomers face the following challenges and barriers one way or another after they arrive in their new cities:

- ◆ **Language, Culture and Participation.** Language and cultural adaptation are challenges for many immigrants. The culture shock can be particularly strong for refugee

children, who must adjust to a whole new way of life, including: new types of homes, architecture and neighbourhood layouts; new foods, clothing styles and toys; and different civic cultures, rules and expectations (from street signs to voting). Immigrants may also experience loneliness and isolation, as they have left their extended family and friends and may be adjusting to life in a more individualistic culture. Immigrants may also experience exclusion from political participation, which may reduce their interest in participating in their new society.

- ◆ **Climate.** Weather is something that many newcomers struggle with, especially those who arrive in Canada during the winter season.
- ◆ **Lack of Social Support.** Social support and interaction are other challenges for many immigrants. Most of them find the lack of social support and interaction as their main challenge, especially those who have neither close friends nor family members here already who can direct them to resources. That is to say, inadequate social support has negative impact on newcomers: isolation, depression, being in limbo, lack of identity, and difficulty in seeking employment.
- ◆ **Employment Barriers.** Newcomers' lack of credential recognition, job networks, and Canadian work experience are factors that may make it difficult to find good jobs that earn a decent standard of living; as a result, many immigrant families live below the low income cut off.
- ◆ **Discrimination.** Some immigrants may also face racial discrimination in the cities and neighbourhoods they settle in. While this is not the experience of all newcomers, there are stories of exclusionary and discriminatory practices in the workplace and the community (e.g. being denied jobs for lacking Canadian work experience, devaluation of

(Continued on page 2)



Lunch & Learn Series



Immigrant Experiences in Edmonton

February 10, 2010
@ 12pm

Stanley Milner Library

The first in our series of lunch-time talks features **John Bol**, Sudanese refugee and ESPC intern, and **Jim Gurnett**, former Executive Director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.

Come out to gain insight into the experiences of immigrants to Edmonton.

The event is **free of charge** & open to the public.

Bring your lunch!

Immigrant Experiences & Challenges, *cont'd from page 1*

foreign credentials, being passed over for promotions, and being denied apartments).

- ♦ **Benefit Waiting Period.** New immigrants experience a waiting time to be eligible for many benefits including health care insurance (with the exception of financial benefits from the federal government). Refugee applicants, for instance, must wait ninety days to receive full access to health care and other services. This is also true for immigrants with pending residency status. These delays may in part be due to the fact that many new arrivals lack government documentation, which is often required in order to receive service.

Access to benefits is a particular concern for Temporary Foreign Workers, who are not eligible for benefits such as health care insurance, education and social assistance, which are available to Canadian citizens and other immigrants.

- ♦ **Housing.** For many immigrants, finding a place to live (whether renting or buying) during the first few months after arriving is a big concern. New immigrants are often unaware of their rights as renters in Canada and may not be able to identify discriminatory practices (e.g. landlords who claim not to rent to people receiving social assistance). An additional barrier to housing for some immigrants is landlords who require letters from employers. Such requirements can be very difficult for new arrivals to meet.

While all immigrants face these challenges in some way or another, it is important to understand that some face greater barriers than others. Highly-skilled permanent residents, for example, will face fewer barriers to good employment than less-skilled refugees. As noted before, the nature of an immigrant's experience is shaped by their background.

Overcoming Barriers & Challenges

These challenges are real, but they can be overcome. Government agencies and the immigrant community have a role to play in dealing with the challenges of the immigrant experience. I believe that as governments

are becoming more aware of the barriers faced by immigrants they are introducing more services and supports for newcomers. This is especially true in Edmonton.

Although immigrants to Edmonton still experience multiple challenges, there are many services available to them that help to ease the transition to life in Canada. Organizations such as the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Catholic Social Services, and the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, provide essential supports, services and resources to newcomers.

Establishing a good standard of living and becoming active members of society requires more than financial assistance and support services, however. It is also important for immigrants to make connections within the ethnocultural communities and institutions in Edmonton, as well as with mainstream community members and institutions. As an immigrant, I believe that the City of Edmonton is going in the right direction in this regard. Through its Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), the City has played an important role in connecting immigrants to supports and opportunities for involvement in the community. The ODI has also taken a leadership role in increasing the awareness of employers and neighbourhoods regarding immigration, diversity and inclusion issues.

It is my hope that governments, community agencies and immigrant communities will continue to work together to find ways to break down the barriers for newcomers to our city.

Want to learn more about the immigrant experience in Edmonton?

Come out to our Lunch & Learn session on Wednesday, February 10th at noon at the Stanley Milner Library.

(See the side bar on the left for more information.)



An audio version of this newsletter is available on our website (edmontonsocialplanning.ca).

Recordings of *the fACTivist* are generously provided by VoicePrint Canada, the non-profit, 24/7 audio newsstand. Visit www.voiceprintcanada.com for more information.



Do you know a great local social justice advocate?

Each year, the ESPC seeks nominations for its **Award of Merit for Advocacy of Social Justice.**

The Award is intended to honour forward-looking and courageous individuals and groups who have not turned away from controversy in an effort to seek social justice for their community.

We need your help to identify those people who deserve recognition for their tireless dedication to their communities.

For more information, or to download the nomination form, visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca or call Stephanie at 780-423-2031 x 349

Alberta: Land of Temporary Foreign Workers?

By JOHN KOLKMAN, Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator, *Edmonton Social Planning Council*

Immigration has long been one of the defining characteristics of Canada's national identity. As a result of generations of immigrants coming to our shores, Canada today is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. I am myself a first generation immigrant. My parents came to Canada from the Netherlands in the 1950s. Within Canada, Alberta has a deserved reputation as a good place to live and raise a family and—above all—to get a job and make something of yourself.

A Subtle Policy Shift with a Big Impact

Eight years ago, a largely unacknowledged change took place in immigration policy that placed less emphasis on legal immigration and more emphasis on allowing Alberta employers to fill vacant positions using temporary foreign workers (TFWs). Prior to 2002, only seasonal farm workers and live-in caregivers and those working in professions or technical occupations like the construction trades were admitted to Canada. Seasonal farm workers receive a work permit that only covers part of the year. Live-in caregivers have long been given the right to apply for permanent residency after working for several years.

In 2002, the federal government and several provinces, including Alberta, introduced a pilot project to allow workers with lower levels of formal training to enter the province. Since then, the number of TFWs has exploded to become a significant component of the Alberta workforce. The number of temporary foreign workers entering Alberta more than quadrupled from just over 9,000 in 2003 to over 39,000 in 2008. In the past two years, significantly more TFWs entered Alberta than immigrants and refugees entering as permanent residents. By the end of 2008, the total number of TFWs in Alberta was just under 58,000.

The Profile of TFWs in Alberta

Yessie Byl, an Edmonton labour lawyer who advocates for temporary foreign workers, says that the Alberta government has embraced the migrant worker concept more than any other province. With only 11% of the Canadian population, Alberta is home to one in four temporary foreign workers.

Byl points out that the profile of temporary foreign workers has also changed with a much larger percentage filling unskilled or

low skill occupations. In recent years, almost two-thirds of TFWs entered Alberta to work in these kinds of low skilled jobs.

Temporary foreign workers are only about 3 percent of Alberta's overall labour force. However, fully one-third of TFWs work in an occupational category called 'Accommodation and Food Services,' which covers businesses such as hotels, motels and fast food restaurants. It's hard to see how some of these businesses could function without foreign workers.

The decision to vastly expand the temporary foreign worker program was made during a time when the Alberta economy was booming and many employers were complaining of widespread labour shortages.

The Impact of the Recession

Surprisingly, the recession that started in the fall of 2008 has slowed—but not stopped—the number of approvals under the TFW program. There have still been close to 23,000 positions for TFWs approved in the first nine months of 2009. Again, 60% of the applications were for low or unskilled positions. Yessie Byl does note, however, that some of the 2009 approvals may be renewals of existing work permits.

The assumption behind the temporary foreign worker program is that workers would return to their home country after their work permit expires. While this assumption may be reasonable for professionals or skilled trades people, Byl says it was never a valid assumption for low skilled workers.

Byl notes that many unskilled workers lack the necessary education or work experience to qualify to come to Canada as economic immigrants. In this sense, the TFW program was their ticket to come to Canada and allowed them to bypass the immigration queue entirely.

The impact of the recession has been severe both for temporary foreign workers and other workers against which they compete for low skill jobs. "In some cases, it makes sense for employers to keep TFWs and lay off other workers," says Byl. A recent Statistics Canada report provides evidence that this is in fact happening. This may help explain why over one in five recent immigrants between the ages of 25 to 54 has lost their job in Alberta in the past year.

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Films About the Immigrant Experience

There are many contemporary films on the theme of immigration to the United States and Canada. The following are just a few that can contribute to our understanding of the diversity of newcomers' experiences:

[In America \(2002\)](#)

The story of an Irish family that immigrates to the United States.

[God Grew Tired of Us \(2006\)](#)

A documentary of the story of three young Sudanese refugees to the US.

[The Visitor \(2007\)](#)

A story about an American man who discovers a pair of homeless, illegal aliens living in his apartment.

[Amreeka \(2009\)](#)

An award-winning film about a Palestinian mother and son who immigrate to the US.

[1999 \(2009\)](#)

A movie about the struggles of first generation Tamil immigrants, in particular the youth, in Canada.

Temporary Foreign Workers, *cont'd from page 3*

Some employers are letting temporary foreign workers go after their two-year work permit expires. "In my experience, very few of these laid off temporary workers return to their home country," says Byl. "They tell me that they can't afford to go home. Many were falsely told by brokers who recruited them to come to Alberta that they would be allowed to stay permanently."

There have been growing calls for a suspension of the temporary foreign worker program from labour unions, immigrant serving agencies, opposition parties and social justice organizations. Despite this, the federal and provincial governments continue to insist that labour shortages persist and that problems with TFWs are isolated.

Relying on temporary foreign workers to fill low skill or unskilled jobs is not a sound social policy from either a labour force or economic justice perspective. Despite ample warnings from Yessie Byl and others, the federal and provincial governments seem determined to repeat the mistakes Europe and the United States have made with their temporary migrant worker programs. This includes a growing number of undocumented workers, many of whom work in informal jobs as part of a growing underground economy.

Want to know more about temporary foreign workers?

Check out the following online resources:

- ♦ 2008 Facts and Figures on immigration and temporary foreign workers: www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/facts2008.pdf
- ♦ Facts and Figures on Labour Market Opinions needed for recruitment of temporary foreign workers: www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/foreign_workers/stats/index.shtml
- ♦ Reports by the Temporary Foreign Worker Advocate:
 - *Entrenching Exploitation* (April 2009): www.afl.org/upload/TFWReport2009.pdf
 - *Alberta's Disposable Workforce* (November 2007): www.afl.org/upload/AFLTFW.pdf
- ♦ Canada's Employment Downturn, in *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. (Statistics Canada, December 2009): www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/75-001-x2009112-eng.pdf

Immigrant Employment Council Ready to Launch

The Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC) was established in 2008 to address an urgent need within the Edmonton area—addressing barriers to immigrant's meaningful labour market participation. It is an industry-led not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that immigrants are welcomed and able to participate in the economy at the level of their full potential.

ERIEC is currently in the process of establishing itself as a unique and relevant organization in the areas of skilled immigrant employment and integration for the Edmonton region. The following are some of the organization's major projects:

♦ **Business Mentorship Pilot Program**

The ERIEC Business Mentorship Pilot Program was launched in November 2009. Designed to be occupation-specific, the

program matches foreign-trained professional newcomers with established Canadian professionals within the same occupation. Mentors belonging to the Edmonton business community have volunteered to support and encourage newcomers' efforts to become professionally established. Corporate participants in the mentorship pilot include: TD Bank, CoSyn, Worley Parsons, Enbridge, Telus, KPMG, Schlumberger Artificial Lift and other independent business partners. ERIEC is scaling up the Business Mentorship Program in 2010.

♦ **Web Portal**

ERIEC is dedicated to ensuring immigrants become more fully integrated into the Edmonton regional labor market by focusing on knowledge transfer, information coordination and

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ERIEC, *cont'd from page 4*

dissemination, and capacity-building for employers, service providers and underemployed skilled immigrants. By providing an easy-to-access and navigate web portal to the public, ERIEC aims to respond to the information needs of employers, immigrants and immigrant serving agencies. The tentative web portal launch date is planned for March 2010.

- ♦ **ERIEC's Foreign Qualifications Innovative Research Project:** *"Assessment and Selection of Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) Models for the ERIEC Mentorship Program"*

This project is being done in collaboration with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers' research team and notable PLAR experts, Dianne Conrad, Joy Van Kleef and John Konrad. The ultimate goal is to facilitate employers' access to potential immigrant candidates and to support mentees in obtaining employment. The project—to be completed by March 2010—intends to identify and determine the feasibility of a PLAR model that can be incorporated into the ERIEC Mentorship program.



- ♦ **Alberta Employment and Immigration (AEI) - Foreign Qualifications Recognition (FQR)/Conference Board of Canada – Edmonton Forum for Employers**

ERIEC was asked in December 2009 to take a lead role with Alberta Employment and Immigration on a timely upcoming forum for Edmonton employers in order to help facilitate the discussion around FQR issues and opportunities. The event is being planned for March, 2010.

- ♦ **ERIEC Official Public Launch**

ERIEC will be hosting its official public launch in March 2010. We have drawn upon the marketing and communications expertise of the Dagny Partnership whom we have contracted to assist in planning the public launch. Our theme: 'READY, WILLING AND CAPABLE'.

For more information on ERIEC and its programs, visit www.eriec.ca.

Looking for a Flexible Volunteer Opportunity?

Get involved with some of our exciting anniversary projects!

We are looking for people to write great articles for the fACTivist based on the materials in our archives.

We also need support in producing commemorative materials for our anniversary gala in the Fall.

Visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca & fill out our Volunteer Application form (*under the Support Us tab*).

meet the ESPC STAFF

John Bol: Sudanese Social Work Student & Community Leader



John Chuol Bol joined the ESPC in September 2009 as a Practicum Student from Grant MacEwan University and currently is in his second year of the social work program. John's first practicum was with the

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, where he provided holistic needs assessment and counseling of immigrant and refugee clients.

John was born in Southern Sudan, Africa. Before he moved to Edmonton in 2004, John spent 11 years in refugee camp in East Africa, Ethiopia, where he became a community leader and worked with the UN World Food Program and the Zoa Refugee Care agency (UNHCR). He also enjoyed singing in the choir!

John has established an equally active life in Edmonton. In addition to his course load and practicum placement, John works as an interpreter with The Family Centre and the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, providing language interpretation and support to Sudanese families. John is also an animator with the Multicultural Coalition, coordinating a variety of activities for the Sudanese community; he is involved in many community programs and discussions with the City of Edmonton's Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

John's vast experience in community activity and social support enables him to be an advocate for social change and social justice.

To hear more about John's story and his experiences as a refugee in Edmonton, come to our Lunch & Learn session on Feb 10th. (See page 2 for more information.)



A Welcoming Centre for Edmonton's Newcomers

By MADHU SOOD, *Welcome Centre for Immigrants*

Looking for Information on Social Issues?

Visit the **ESPC Resource Library** today!

Open to the public:
M– F 8:30am- 4:30pm

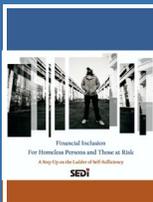
Online Catalogue:
Available 24/7 @ socialresearchlibrary.ca

Our resource library is a rich source of current and historical publications on social issues.

Featured Reports:

Financial Inclusion For Homeless persons and Those at Risk.

(Social and Enterprise Development Innovations, 2008)



Stretched to the Limit: Economic Impact Survey, Alberta's Nonprofits & Charities. (Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, 2009)

The *Welcome Centre* in South Edmonton (formerly known as the Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants) is a unique wrap-around initiative between three community partners—Catholic Social Services, the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and the Indo-Canadian Women's Association. The Centre was created to build resiliency in our community by supporting aspirations and integration of newcomers to South Edmonton.

By removing barriers to success and offering promotion, prevention and intervention programs in our community we work to help all newcomer families build a positive and hopeful settlement process and a new Canadian definition of themselves. Our partner organizations are built on hope and recognition that connecting families and individuals with caring services and meaningful opportunities can—and will—change the future for many newcomers.

The Welcome Centre is based in South Edmonton, which is an incredibly resilient community due in large part to the people who live here, and to the churches, mosques, gurudwaras, and temples who support them spiritually. Geographically, South Edmonton is divided into two parts by the Queen Elizabeth highway and has limited transport links. Most services are based north of the river, with only a handful of service agencies in the locality.

The Centre is not a legal entity nor a registered charity, but rather an umbrella organization that has been working in South Edmonton for over a decade. It is one of the oldest not-for-profit collaborations in Edmonton. The Centre functions as:

1. An **umbrella organization** that co-locates and manages staff of the 3 immigrant serving agencies in one location to provide one-stop seamless services to newcomers.
2. A **community-based** wrap-around, and a nurturing **incubator of initiatives** that meet the needs of newcomers.
3. A **non-denominational community hub**, providing newcomers with opportunities to develop self-help initiatives and build community.

The Welcome Centre is basically supporting the aspirations of newcomers—connecting dots and helping to make connections beneath the skin. **So what does that mean?**

Supporting Aspirations.

Within a couple of days of landing at Edmonton International Airport, newcomers walk through our door seeking advice and assistance. They are greeted by the smiling faces of Karuna or Sunita, and nobody cares that the carpet is threadbare. At times, there isn't even standing space, since the reception area also acts as the waiting area, intake processing, and drop-in computer lab.

Most of the newcomers have come with a suitcase or two, their family, and a few dollars which may have taken decades to save. Their faces are bright and eyes alight with excitement at the thought of their new life and the opportunities ahead. We offer them a Welcome gift of a soft toy for their children and begin the work of finding out who they are. Thus begins the journey of aspirations supported by our staff—Jeanette, Jane, Chouaib, Olga, Arshad, Chau, Lubna, Muhammed, and Paul.

The settlement process for immigrants can be an extremely isolating and a challenging transition between the country of origin and the new country. However, our experience over the last decade of work in providing employment and settlement services in South Edmonton have shown that:

1. It is critical to understand the demographic pattern of settlement for the locality (i.e. where are newcomers coming from?).
 - a. Country of Origin
 - b. Social composition of the society of origin
2. We have to understand what assets newcomers bring with them:
 - a. Social assets—family, friends, community links
 - b. Physical assets—financial, furniture, health, etc.
 - c. Mental assets—skills, qualifications, experiences
3. In order to support the aspirations of newcomers and guide their settlement process, we must provide the three key service delivery components:
 - a. **Orientation**—to provide answers to information newcomers do not know
 - b. **Support**—to fast track newcomers' settlement process

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The Future of Community:

Speakers Series

The ESPC, E4C and the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year:

ECF — 20 years
E4C — 40 years
&
ESPC — 70 years

To celebrate their achievements in service provision, advocacy and community support, the 3 agencies are co-hosting an exciting speakers series.

The speakers include:

Zaib Shaikh—Feb 18th
Joel Cohen—Apr 8th
Linda Hughes—May 13th
Sheila Watt-Cloutier—Sep 15th

Get your tickets today through TIX on the Square (tixonthesquare.ca)

Welcome Centre, *cont'd from page 6*

- c. **Tools**—to ensure that newcomers are equipped to meet the challenges of their integration process

Connecting Dots

The newcomers who come through our door share a number of characteristics:

- ♦ Most are looking for a job.
- ♦ Half of them have come as family sponsored, and half as independent applicants.
- ♦ Most have limited financial reserves.
- ♦ Many are very highly skilled professionals—doctors, accountants, teachers, IT specialists, etc.

Thus begins the journey of shock for the newcomers with the realization that:

- ♦ the qualifications they have come with have little or no value
- ♦ over 70% of the jobs are not advertised
- ♦ the money they have brought is quickly running out and everything costs so much.

The bright faces begin to turn grey. Their mental health begins to deteriorate. A few people at this point decide that the struggle is too hard and decide to return to whence they came.

We continue to work with the remainder to uplift their spirits and connect them to opportunities for bridging programs, new qualifications, and transitional jobs. The Centre also helps them to make connections through volunteering opportunities and gaining Canadian work experience.

From April to December 2009, the Welcome Centre saw newcomers originating from 39 different countries, and in that period we have served over 900 new clients. The sole funding for the Welcome Centre comes from Canada Immigration and Citizenship—we are truly grateful to the federal government for their support.

Making Connexions Beneath the Skin

The economic meltdown has affected newcomers hard. Jobs are scarce and many families are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, in the last 8 months we have begun a journey of supporting our users to make connections and to develop their own solutions.



Above: Seniors Gathering practicing yoga.

Making Connexions Beneath the Skin is a project in its infancy where newcomers are being supported by the Welcome Centre to become involved in self-help and civic engagement as part of their settlement process.

A great example of solutions to come of the *Making Connexions* project is 'Mrs. P,' who is starting her own food business. Another example is 'Mr. B' who organized a Seniors Gathering at the Welcome Centre once a fortnight. The gathering gives seniors a chance to share a meal and organize activities and strategies for tackling their isolation.

We are working with our users to knock on doors, ask questions, propose suggestions and develop solutions that help them to connect and build social capital for the community in South Edmonton. This journey has just started and we welcome any and all who want to join us in building a diverse community.

"Coming to Canada has been a very tough decision for us as we do not have any family here. I felt very lucky to be a part of this summer school as it helped me build a network of friends and meet new immigrants like myself. I met people/children from different cultures and it was very nice to see the diversity around me. The staff were very cooperative and helpful."

- Quote from a community connectors in the Welcome Centre Summer Program

Want to learn more about the Welcome Centre? Call (780) 462-6924.

Disclaimer: Articles, quotes and commentary in this edition of *the fACTivist* produced by contributors outside the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the ESPC.



ESPC's Past Work on Immigration

A quick scan of the ESPC archives found some interesting publications on immigration and diversity:

- ♦ **Insights into Cultural Differences (1963)**
A collection of materials presented at a seminar on cultural differences.
[See page 10 for more on this publication.]
- ♦ **Alberta Facts: We Are Not Racists But... (1994)**
A fact sheet discussing the myths and realities of racism in Alberta.
- ♦ **People, Jobs and the Changing Workplace: A Training Manual ... (1995)**
A guide to integrating "cultural minorities" into the workplace.
- ♦ **First Reading: Button Up on Human Rights (1996)**
A collection of articles related to human rights and diversity.
- ♦ **Over-qualified, Under-employed: Accessibility Barriers to Accreditation ... (2000)**
A report on the barriers to employment for highly skilled immigrant women.

Want to read any of these publications?

See the side bar on page 9 for information.

New National Framework on Immigrant Credentials

By JENNIFER HOYER, *Resource Co-ordinator, ESPC*

New immigrants to Canada face many obstacles as they adapt to life in a new country. On top of a variety of language and social barriers, countless immigrants are frustrated when they find themselves unable to work in their field of expertise. Despite coming to Canada with "skilled worker" on their application, they discover that their credentials and experience are not given equal weight in their new country. As they wait to find out if their qualifications meet Canadian standards they are often forced to work in low-paying jobs outside their field while waiting for assessment of their credentials. The present system for foreign credential recognition is frustrating and complicated; new immigrants may have difficulty accessing reliable information on regulatory requirements and processes, and opportunities to upgrade or recertify may be limited or difficult to access.

In November 2009, the Canadian government announced a new Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. This joint effort between federal, provincial, and territorial governments is designed to streamline the review process of foreign credentials, of both immigrants and foreign-trained Canadians, to verify that foreign training and expertise meets Canadian standards.

The Framework sets out several goals for itself. Overall, it aims to make the process of assessing and verifying foreign credentials fair, transparent, timely, and consistent. To this end, the various levels of government will co-operate to develop a stronger system for credential recognition, and assessment processes will be streamlined to avoid duplication between various departments or professional organizations. Immigrants will receive clear information about credential certification as early in the immigration process as possible; ultimately they will begin assessment before arriving in Canada. Immigrants will receive support throughout the assessment process, and decisions about their qualifications will be clearly explained. Several outcomes and benchmarks are outlined to measure the success of the Framework: ideally, all immigrants would receive assessment of their qualifications within one year, although exceptions are made for "cases where it is

not appropriate or practical to come to a recognition decision within one year".

This is obviously a huge task for the government to set itself, and a list of target occupations are provided as a starting place. Assessment processes for architects, engineers, financial auditors and accountants, medical lab techs, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and registered nurses will be streamlined by December 31, 2010. A secondary list indicates that dentists, engineering technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, physicians, and teachers will see new programs to help them in place by December 31, 2012.

Concerns About the Framework

The program has its critics, notably in NDP Immigration Critic Olivia Chow. Chow states that these reforms will not bring about change quickly enough. She points to NDP recommendations on credential assessment which suggest that government and professional bodies come to agreements which allow immigrants to begin work immediately.

Others have criticized the motives behind this announcement; from the outset of the report, the government acknowledges that it seeks to embrace the skills of foreign professionals in order to achieve "Canada's economic potential". Critics suggest that Canada will streamline immigration for those whose skills can bolster our economy; others fall on the secondary list or are not mentioned.

Concerns have also been raised that this framework focuses on bringing highly skilled professionals to Canada when in fact we may not need more employees in some of the occupations listed; employment or placements are not available in every profession. Foreign-trained doctors have complained that their qualifications receive relatively quick assessment, but Canada does not have enough residency placements to allow them to fulfill this required step in the process. Facilitating the assessment of medical credentials so that more doctors immigrate to Canada will not ultimately help more immigrant doctors find jobs.

At the same time, blue collar workers who wish to immigrate, and whose skills are

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Interested in the History of Social Issues in Edmonton?

You can browse through the ESPC's work from the past 70 years in our publication archive.

ESPC members can now access the archive online!

Contact Anette at 780.423.2031 x 351 or anettek@edmontonsocialplanning.ca for more information.

Not an ESPC Member?

Become one today! Just send in the membership application on page 10.

Pan-Canadian Framework, *cont'd from page 8*

needed in construction or other labour industries, are held back by Canada's point system and forced to come as temporary foreign workers or as illegal immigrants. Questions have been raised about why the government is not doing more to bring in needed immigrant manpower; the Pan-Canadian Framework gives no help to immigrants or employers in this category.

The federal government's new Framework is interesting and targets an important issue, but only time will tell if it is what Canada and our immigrant populations badly need.

To take a look at the report yourself, visit www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/publications/fcr/pcf.shtml

Newcomers & Long-time Legacies Kick-Off 2010

by SUSAN MORRISSEY, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council

Welcome to our first edition of *the fACTivist in 2010*—our 70th anniversary year! This edition highlights some of the programs and projects related to immigration in Edmonton. We also have some great articles on the issues faced by immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers in our city.

There are issues around immigration that certainly have an impact our community which you will read about. There are also some very innovative projects taking root that are looking at ways to help integrate new Canadians into the Edmonton region. As our current social work student, John Bol, has repeatedly said, "It's not easy coming to a new country, with a different culture and way of life." [See page 1 and page 5 for more on John's experience.]

This edition also features some of the other things the ESPC has and continues to be involved in—including the launch and year long celebration of our 70th anniversary of operation [see page 10 and 11]. I would encourage everyone to keep an eye on our website throughout the year to see what events we have planned. I welcome everyone to get involved in these activities to help us celebrate the Council's many achievements. 70 years is a **long time**, and Edmonton has seen much change over the years. It's great to be a part of an organization that has such a long legacy of taking an active role in addressing the social service needs of the community.

ESPC United Way Campaign Exceeds Fundraising Target

Every year, the ESPC runs its own internal fundraising campaign on behalf of the United Way. The 2009 campaign was the most successful yet, raising a **total of \$2,670**—exceeding the target set at the beginning of the campaign by 33%. Since 2005, there has been an almost four-fold increase in giving through the internal campaign.

There was 100% participation in the campaign by ESPC staff. Several members of the ESPC Board of Directors also contributed generously. The combined efforts of Board and staff in making donations, combined with the proceeds from our November 26 bake sale, were instrumental in making this year's campaign the most successful one yet.

meet the ESPC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Janet Bauer: Educator with a Passion for Youth Development



Janet Bauer is one of the newest editions to the ESPC Board, having joined in May 2009. Janet's professional career has been in the non-profit sector. She is an educator specializing in English as a Second Language and adult literacy.

Prior to returning to Edmonton, Janet was engaged in the shelter movement as an anti-violence educator and protocol development worker. Her current employment—and her passion—involves youth development projects for Action for Healthy Communities. At home, Janet and her husband are happily surviving two teenagers and an adult daughter.



Looking Back: Different Immigrants, Similar Issues

by ANETTE KINLEY, *Research & Communications Assistant, Edmonton Social Planning Council*

One of the earlier pieces of work in the ESPC publication archives related to immigrant issues is a collection of information presented at the Council's 1963 seminar, *Insights into Cultural Differences*.

For anyone who follows immigration issues in Edmonton today—many of which are touched on in the other articles in this newsletter—this publication truly brings to light the similarities between the experiences of immigrants in 1960 and 2010. The profile of immigrants to our city has changed significantly over the past 50 years, but many of the challenges and barriers have remained strikingly similar.

Changing Faces of Edmonton Immigrants

By 1961, Canada had welcomed two million post-war immigrants from Europe, making one in every nine Canadians newcomers. Edmonton was home to 281,027 people in 1961, 45 percent of which were of British Isles origin. The remainder of the population was from Europe and Asia. (Just 491 people in the city were classified as “negro,” or African American.) Immigrants from Germany, the Netherlands and Italy were the fastest growing ethnic groups between 1951 and 1961.

Edmonton's population growth since 1961 has, of course, been tremendous—in 2009, the city's population reached 782,439. The ethnic composition of the city has also changed considerably. As of the last federal census in 2006, just 28 percent of Edmontonians reported being of British Isles

origin. The West Asian and African segments of the populations experienced the greatest growth between 2001 and 2006.

Challenges for New Canadians: 1960s

One of the main presentations delivered at the *Insights* seminar identified a number of the major challenges faced by “New Canadians” at the time. These included:

- ♦ **Language.** The difficulty for older newcomers to learn English often resulted in tension between parents and children regarding the language spoken at home. Language was also a significant barrier to employment.
- ♦ **Employment.** Language and cultural barriers made it challenging to find decent work. Unskilled labourers were also at risk of being exploited by “unscrupulous contractors,” given the threat of deportation for unemployed immigrants.
- ♦ **Social Services.** Newcomers arrived with varied expectations regarding social services and their personal rights and obligations. Some people, for example, came from countries with stronger social safety nets that more fully protected them in the event of illness or unemployment. Others were not aware of the government's right to intervene in family matters (child protection, etc.).

While improvements have been made over the last five decades in relation to these barriers, newcomers today face many of the same challenges. *Flip to the articles on pages 1, 3 and 6 to learn more!*

Immigration in the Movies

The following movies were screened at the “*Insights into Cultural Differences*” seminar hosted by the Edmonton Welfare Council (now the ESPC) in 1963:

Citizen Varek (1953)

A film about the journey of European immigrants to achieve Canadian citizenship.

Arrival (1957)

A film about an Italian immigrant who brings his family to Canada.

The Threshold (1959)

A film about immigrant families' first contact with Canada's education system.

Flip to page 4 for a selection of contemporary films about the immigrant experience.

In Pictures: Anniversary Launch at City Hall a Great Success



Left: Deputy Mayor Karen Liebovici presents a celebratory scroll to ESPC Executive Director, Susan Morrissey and Board President, Douglas Meggison. City Councillors Amarjeet Sohi and Ben Henderson were also in attendance. Right: Guests enjoyed some delicious birthday cake after the short program.



To see more pictures and videos from the Launch event, visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca



Celebrating 70 Years

A Legacy of Commitment to Community

The ESPC is celebrating its 70th Anniversary in 2010!

We are planning some great events over the course of the year to recognize this significant milestone, including:

♦ **Lunchtime Learning Series @ Stanley Milner Library**

The topics planned for these lunch time talks:

- The Immigrant Experience, Feb 10th (see page 2 for details)
- Homelessness, April
- Seniors, June
- Food Security, September
- Poverty, October
- Disability, December

♦ **Celebratory Gala, Fall 2010. (Details TBD)**

To top it all off—every 2010 edition of the *fACTivist* will feature articles highlighting the evolving work of the Council and its achievements of over the past 7 decades.

Without a dissenting voice, representatives of 50 Edmonton social service organizations at a meeting in the MacDonald Tuesday night voted to co-ordinate their efforts and moved toward inauguration of a council of social agencies, a family welfare bureau and a social service exchange or index. ...

“Something we have long dreamed of has come to pass” declared Rev J.T. Stephens ... He said it was an opportunity for all to join in the accomplishment of a magnificent job of humanitarianism for the city.”

“This is a real Canadianism,” said Mr. Stephens. “In the past there has been a sense of competition rather than co-operation.”

~ ‘50 Social Service Groups Vote to Coordinate Work.’ *Edmonton Journal*, June 28, 1939: p1,5.

Council Hits Ground Running—Eventful First Decade

By TERESA RITTER, *ESPC Volunteer*

The ESPC has just entered its 70th year, and looking back we can see continuity, change and evolution.

The Council’s roots began to grow even earlier than 1940 with a survey of the city’s social service needs and resources. The survey was organized by a citizen group and conducted by the Canadian Welfare Council in 1929. The resulting report urged social service agencies to maximize efforts and minimize duplication through central planning. Despite support for the report’s recommendations, the identified social issues persisted and the available assistance remained relatively unchanged throughout the Great Depression.

However, by 1939 the improving economy and the Second World War spurred a renewed interest in social service planning. With assistance from the Canadian Welfare Council, a plan to move forward with social planning in Edmonton was developed.

The Early Days

The plan’s three-pronged approach called for central administration of the planning, coordinating and financing of social services, and by 1941 Edmonton’s *Council of Social Agencies*—the original precursor to today’s ESPC—was in full swing. At this time the Council was comprised of 68 member agencies divided into four Divisions: family; children; health; and, group (interagency) work. Each member was permitted two representatives to its chosen Division, and each Division was charged with making recommendations to the Executive Council. The Council focused on central planning and facilitating coordination in the social services field, aiming to avoid service overlap and fill service gaps.

Stemming from recommendations in its foundational plan, the Council created three central agencies:

- ♦ **The Family Welfare Bureau** was created to meet the need for family case work services in the city. First operated as a sub-agency of the Council, the Bureau was joined by the Catholic Welfare Bureau—already in operation for seven years—to directly serve families and act as a referral agency. Soon after, the newly formed organization became independent of the Council, eventually changing its name to the Family Service Association—what we know today as the Family Centre.
- ♦ **The Social Service Exchange** was created to prevent duplication of service. It was a confidential index, listing clients of social welfare organizations. Member agencies could use the index to determine any assistance being accessed by a potential client before providing services. Over time the Exchange became riddled with problems, including concerns around privacy and inconsistent use. The Exchange was discontinued in 1956.
- ♦ **The Community Chest**—another sub-agency of the Council—acted as a central funding body for member agencies. It is still in existence today, operating as the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region .

By 1945—the end of the war—the Council was ready to evolve. Organizational changes moved it towards more proactive work—like research and social action—that could lead to reform. By the Council’s 10th Anniversary in 1950, it had gained significant public recognition, allowing for an important shift in its role. Entering its second decade, the Council rewrote its Constitution, renamed itself the *Council of Community Services* and expanded its scope to address the social welfare of the entire community.



our VISION

A healthy, just and inclusive community.

our MISSION

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership to the community and its organizations in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy.

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by BECOMING A MEMBER, you will...

- ... support our efforts to remain on the forefront in dealing with social issues
- ... make it possible for us to distribute our materials freely and widely to all
- ... receive our newsletters, fact sheets and other publications
- ... be eligible to vote at ESPC AGMs and have a say in the direction of the organization
- ... be eligible to serve on the board of directors



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Name _____

Organization _____

Position _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **Fax** _____

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Membership Type	Fees
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Donations Welcome - Can be included with cheque or money order for membership.

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