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# **Enhancing Services and Supports for Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region**

## **Final Report**

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**March 2000**



*Centre for Research & Education in Human Services*

## **This research project was completed by:**



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# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
AN OVERVIEW OF WATERLOO REGION.....	2
IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN OUR REGION .....	3
SERVICES AVAILABLE TO IMMIGRANT YOUTH.....	8
<b>RESEARCH APPROACH .....</b>	<b>10</b>
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH .....	10
ECOLOGICAL (RECOGNIZING INFLUENCES ON YOUTH).....	11
NON-EXPERIMENTAL.....	11
<b>RESEARCH PROCESS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT .....	12
CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS.....	12
HOLDING A COMMUNITY FORUM.....	14
DEVELOPING ACTION STEPS .....	15
DISSEMINATION OF PRODUCTS.....	15
<b>EVALUATION OF RESEARCH PROCESS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
REFLECTIONS ON FOCUS GROUPS .....	17
REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY FORUM.....	18
<b>RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
ISSUES FACING IMMIGRANT YOUTH.....	19
PRESENT SOURCES OF SUPPORT .....	23
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUPPORTS.....	27
<b>ACTION STEPS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>32</b>

# **Enhancing Services and Supports for Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region**

## **Introduction**

This report outlines the process and findings of an eight-month research project on immigrant youth in Waterloo Region. Carried out by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, the research was funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and was one of seven similar projects across the province.

The purpose of this research project was two-fold: 1) to understand the diverse settlement issues of immigrant youth (aged 16-20) within Waterloo Region, and 2) to develop specific and concrete strategies for supporting youth to address their issues.

There were three main reasons why this study was carried out. These were as follows:

- ♦ Relatively little research has been done exploring the issues immigrant youth face in Canada.
- ♦ There is a diverse immigrant population in Waterloo Region
- ♦ Local service providers identified gaps in supports for immigrant youth in Waterloo Region.

These reasons showed that it was time to better understand what immigrant youth experience when coming to Waterloo Region. It was also time for action--coming up with solutions to support immigrant youth in adjusting to their new home. Each of the three needs are outlined in more detail below.

### **1) Contributing to the research on immigrant youth in Canada**

Despite a rapid and diverse growth of immigration to Canada since the 1960's, there has been relatively little research on immigrant youth carried out in Canada. In fact, there has been substantially more research carried out on the adjustment of immigrant adults than on immigrant youth (Hicks, Lalonde & Pepler, 1993; Beiser et al, 1988). Our study helped to fill this gap by investigating the challenges faced by a specific age group of immigrant youth (aged 16-20) in adapting to Canada.

### **2) Responding to a diverse immigrant population in Waterloo Region**

Our research focused on the specific settlement needs of recent immigrant youth within the Region of Waterloo. This is a region with a relatively large, diverse and growing immigrant and immigrant youth population.

For example, we know that in 1996, 21% of residents in the region were immigrants. Of all immigrants in Waterloo Region, 42% were under the age of 20 years old (Statistics Canada).

We also know that Kitchener (the largest city of the region) has the fourth largest immigrant population of all cities in Canada, with approximately one quarter (24.5%) of all residents being immigrants (1996 Census). We will give a more detailed picture of immigrants in Waterloo Region in the next section of this report.

### **3) Responding to gaps in local supports for immigrant youth**

In preparing the proposal for this study, we held preliminary discussions with selected service providers working with immigrant youth in our region. We learned that immigrant youth needing settlement services consistently fall through the cracks. We also learned that any solutions to address their issues must involve the families of immigrant youth.

Our discussions with local service providers also confirmed our own experiences working with youth at the Centre for Research and Education. Youth typically do not fit well into traditional service programs structured for adults. Strategies to help youth need to start from where youth naturally look to for support (both formal and informal) and then to build on and enhance these. It is not just a matter of giving youth information about existing services or trying to fit them into existing program structures.

One of our project's goals was to find innovative ways of supporting immigrant youth. We anticipated that recommendations for action would build on and improve existing settlement and mainstream services. But we also anticipated that these recommendations would enhance the "natural supports" immigrant youth already had.

## **Understanding the Context**

Before describing the research process and findings, we will give an overview of the context of immigrant youth in Waterloo Region. More specifically, we will profile Waterloo Region, its immigrant youth, and what types of support are presently available to them.

### **An overview of Waterloo Region**

At the start of the new millennium, Waterloo Region is characterized by growth. According to Census information, the population increased 7% between 1991 and 1996 (from 374,250 to 405,435). The population is still growing and new housing construction is booming. The local economy is very strong with the region's past 10 year economic performance ranked higher than Ontario's as a whole (assessed using real GDP base index) (Waterloo Community Health Profile, 1999). In response to this growth, the local

newspaper (*The Kitchener-Waterloo Record*) has been running an ongoing series on “managing growth in the region”, throughout the winter of 2000.

Below we highlight some other key characteristics of the residents of Waterloo Region (based on 1996 Census information).

- Residents of Waterloo Region are slightly younger than the average for Ontario, with 36% of the population between 0-24 years of age.
- Population projections to 2008 show that the number of children and youth aged 0-20 in Waterloo Region will increase at a faster rate than in the province overall.
- 12% of families in the Region are considered low income compared to 15% of Ontario as a whole.

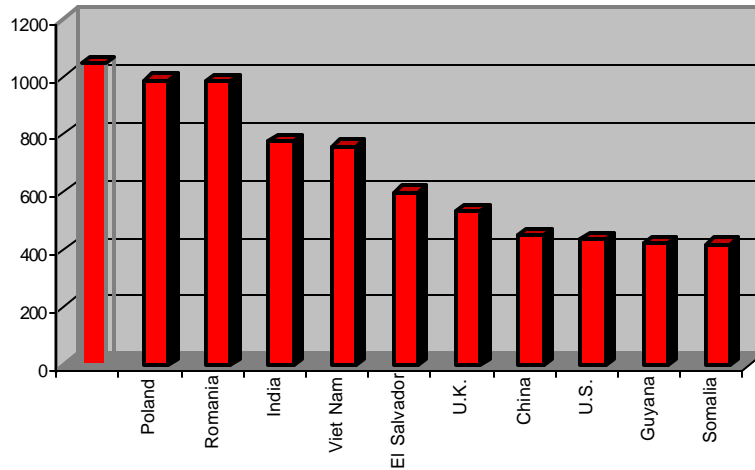
### **Immigrant youth in our region**

We have already mentioned that Waterloo Region has a relatively large, diverse and growing immigrant population. In the 1990's the growth of immigrants has kept pace with the population growth of the entire region. According to Statistics Canada, 21% of residents in the region were immigrants in 1991. This remained consistent to 1996 where, despite a growth in the regional population, statistics show that again 21% of residents were immigrants. Fifteen percent of these immigrants were recent immigrants, having had arrived within the previous five years (i.e. since 1991). Of all immigrants in Waterloo Region in 1996, 42% were under the age of 20 years old (see appendix for more complete Census demographics).

The 1996 Census tells us that the largest group of recent immigrants to Waterloo Region came from Eastern Europe (24%), mainly Poland, Romania and former Yugoslavia. The next largest groups originated from India, Viet Nam, El Salvador, United Kingdom, China, United States, Guyana and Somalia (see graph below).

## Recent Immigrants to Waterloo Region (1991-1996)

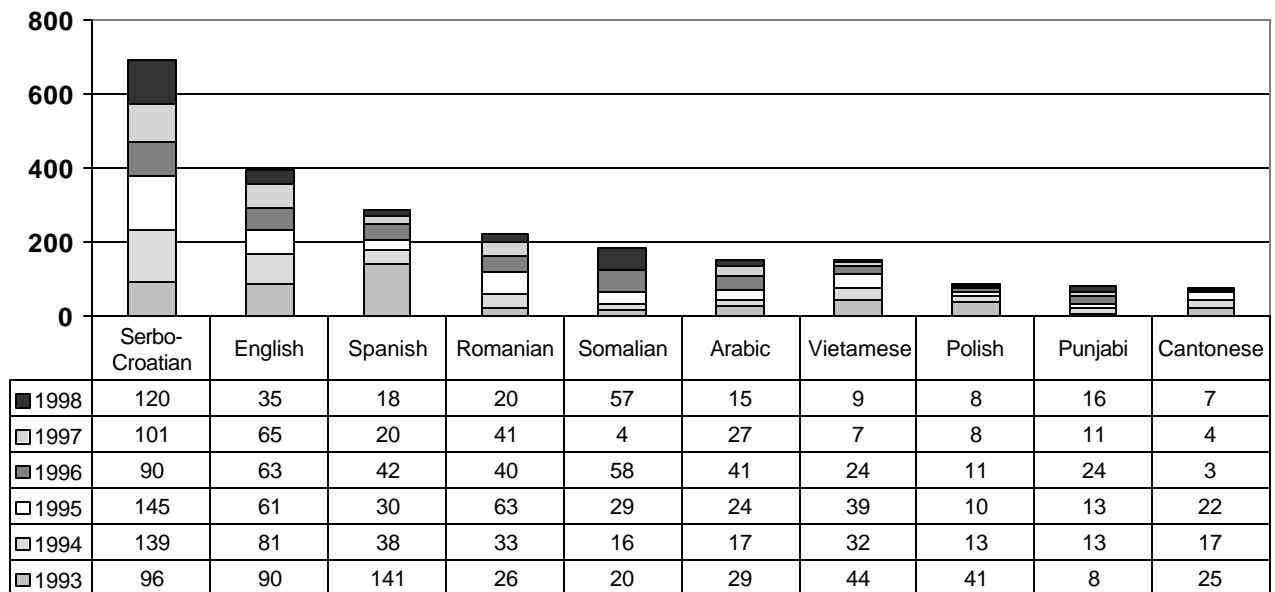
Source: Statistics Canada



Since 1996, the trend of immigrants originating from Yugoslavia and Romania has continued, but the number of immigrants from Poland dropped significantly after 1993 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). The top ten languages of recent immigrant youth (under the age of 20) arriving since 1993 are shown in the graph below.

## Newcomer Children (Age 0-20) Destined to K-W Top Ten Languages, 1993-1999

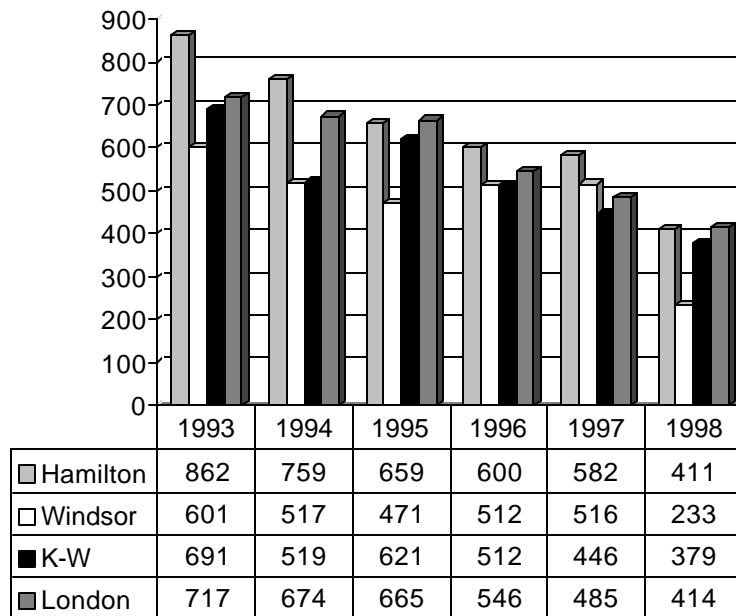
Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



Citizenship and Immigration Canada data reveals that within Waterloo Region, Kitchener was the primary destination for most immigrants in the late 1990's. A total of 974 children between the ages of zero to 17 arrived in Kitchener between 1996 and 1998. The number of immigrant children and youth (aged 0-20) coming to the cities of Kitchener-Waterloo is comparable to those destined to nearby cities (see graph below).

### Newcomer Children (Aged 0-20) Destined to Selected Cities, 1993-1998

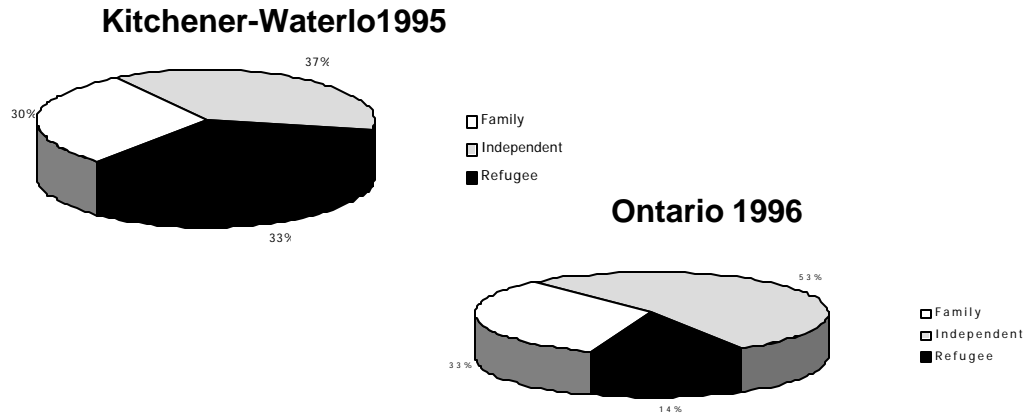
Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



There is one striking characteristic about immigrants and immigrant youth coming to Waterloo Region—many are **refugees**. In fact, as seen in the graph below, the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo receive a much higher proportion of refugees than Ontario as a whole.

## **Immigration Class of Immigrants to Kitchener-Waterloo and Ontario**

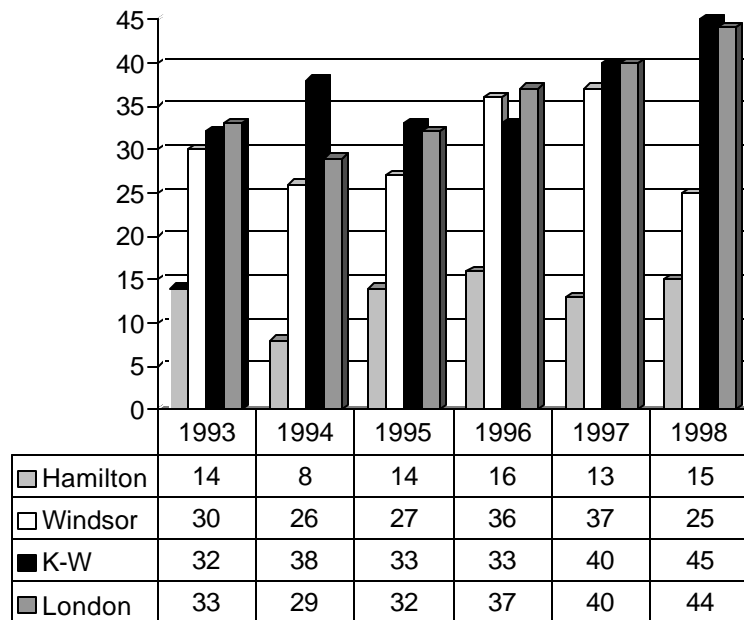
Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



A high proportion of refugees is a phenomenon shared with the city of London, and to a lesser extent Windsor, as well (see graph below). The graph also shows that the percentage of refugees coming to Kitchener-Waterloo has slowly increased through the 1990's. Given the unique challenges refugees have in adapting to their new home country, the high proportion of refugees has implications for the types of services and supports offered to immigrants in the region.

## Percentage of Newcomer Children (Aged 0-20) Being Refugees Destined to Selected Cities, 1993-1998

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



One final point about immigrants in Waterloo Region should be noted. Waterloo Region seems to attract many **secondary migrants** (immigrants moving to the region from other provinces and cities in Canada). Secondary migration is not captured in Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) data. This implies that the region is receiving more recent immigrants than traditional data sources would lead us to believe.

Local service providers estimate that several hundred new immigrants (up to an additional one third of total new arrivals) come to the region each year by way of secondary migration. These immigrants had originally declared another region as their destination (mainly Quebec), but have since moved into our region.

The phenomenon of secondary migration became apparent in 1994 when the Region first emerged from the recession and experienced an increasing employment rate. According to local settlement providers, the Region was attractive for families with children as it also offered diverse opportunities for education (e.g., two universities and a community college) and attractive and affordable housing.

The best indicator of secondary migration is in the number of registrations in elementary English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at the Waterloo Region District School Board. ESL registration had increased from 1,437 in 1994 to 3,107 in 1998. Meanwhile, during the same time period CIC data showed a slight decrease of children and youth destined to the region.

### **Overview of Demographic Highlights**

- ◆ 21% of residents in Waterloo Region are immigrants.
- ◆ 42% of immigrants in Waterloo Region are under the age of 20.
- ◆ Immigrants from the Former Yugoslavia make up the largest group of recent immigrants.
- ◆ Waterloo Region receives a high percentage of refugees relative to other Ontario cities.
- ◆ Waterloo Region seems to attract many secondary migrants (immigrants who first land in another Canadian city and then move to Waterloo Region).

Citizenship and Immigration Canada  
Statistics Canada

### **Services available to immigrant youth**

Immigrant settlement services in Waterloo Region typically have a multicultural focus. Unlike the Greater Toronto Area, very few ethno-specific organizations provide formal settlement services in Waterloo Region. Immigrants typically go to organizations that serve people from multiple ethnic backgrounds. We will notice later in the report that when suggesting future supports, immigrant youth, their parents and service providers also emphasize solutions that are multicultural in focus.

Through our discussions with settlement service providers in Waterloo Region, we learned that three major providers provide formal settlement services:

1. YMCA Settlement and Integration Services
2. Kitchener-Waterloo YMCA Cross-Cultural and Community Services
3. Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre

Settlement services offered through these organizations include:

- ◆ Settlement information
- ◆ Orientation and non-professional counseling for immigrants
- ◆ Interpretation and translation
- ◆ Language testing and referral
- ◆ Employment services
- ◆ Less formal-befriending initiatives
- ◆ Ad-hoc programming for groups with special needs

All three organizations focus on provision of supports to families, but mainly to adults.

Children and youth are supported indirectly through their families. Most of the services for youth deal with assistance in accessing educational institutions and health providers, as well as some crisis intervention.

In addition to the three main settlement services mentioned above, there are four employment support programs for immigrants. These four programs are offered under the umbrella of the New Canadian Employment Services and have a central intake. In addition, a number of ethnic clubs, associations and faith communities offer complementary settlement services and support in helping people sponsor family members and other individuals from overseas.

Services and supports specifically for immigrant youth in Waterloo Region are not that common. Where they do exist, they tend to be less formal in nature. Examples of these “informal support” initiatives include:

- ◆ The School Host Program (through the YMCA Settlement and Integration Services) offers support to immigrant youth through matching them with their Canadian friends from the same school. Since recently, the program also provided support to children who are survivors of war trauma through a play therapy program based on group work.
- ◆ Several ESL programs throughout the Waterloo Region District School Board also offer peer supports for immigrant youth on an occasional basis.
- ◆ The Somali Association in partnership with Big Sisters of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area offer a “homework” club to Somali children who need school work support.
- ◆ K-W Multicultural Centre recently offered an orientation program to newly arrived youth, grades 7 and 8 from Kosovo.

In order to supplement our understanding of mainstream and immigrant-specific services offered in the region, we obtained a listing from the Waterloo Region Community Information Centre. The list includes:

- ◆ 28 *Ethnic Associations*
- ◆ 35 *Service Clubs* providing financial support and fundraising, although they do not respond to direct requests
- ◆ 42 *Sport Clubs and Recreational Programs* (some of which are attached to larger organizations, they don't necessarily focus on new immigrants)
- ◆ 84 *programs for youth* (not only immigrant), dealing with employment, crisis intervention, health promotion and prevention, disability issues, education, casual befriending, drop-ins
- ◆ 13 *programs for new immigrants* (not only youth) providing formal and informal support around settlement and adaptation, interpretation, language assessments and advocacy

In conclusion, although the Region's demographics show an increasingly large and diverse immigrant youth population, services and supports for immigrant youth remain limited. Settlement services tend to focus largely on providing supports to adult

immigrants. Supports to immigrant youth tend to be ad hoc and in small pockets across the Region. Clearly, there is a need for enhancing services and supports for immigrant youth across Waterloo Region.

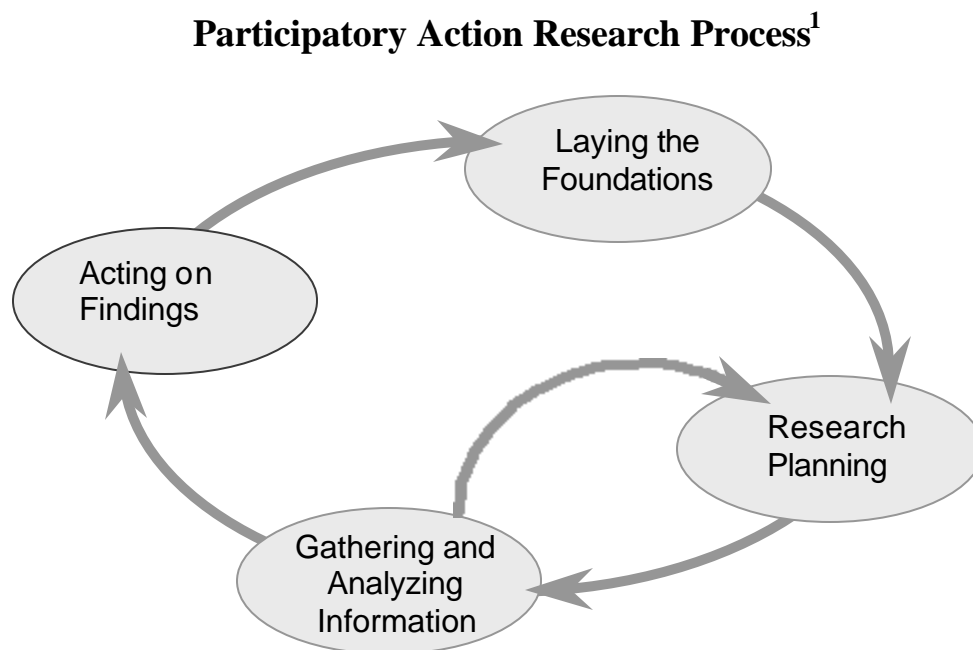
## **Research Approach**

The research approach we used in this project was participatory and action-oriented, ecological and non-experimental. These three characteristics are explained below.

### **1) Participatory action research**

This project used a participatory and action-oriented research approach. By this we mean that the project involved, in various ways, the groups of people who have a stake in the issue of immigrant youth settlement (i.e., immigrant youth, family members, service providers and other community members). Our approach also demonstrated that the process of carrying out the research, itself, became an intervention to enhance services and supports for immigrant youth.

The participatory action research approach used in this research was developed and refined by the Centre for Research and Education over its 18-year history. Notice in the graphic below that one key feature of this approach is the regular feedback loops for reflection and verification.

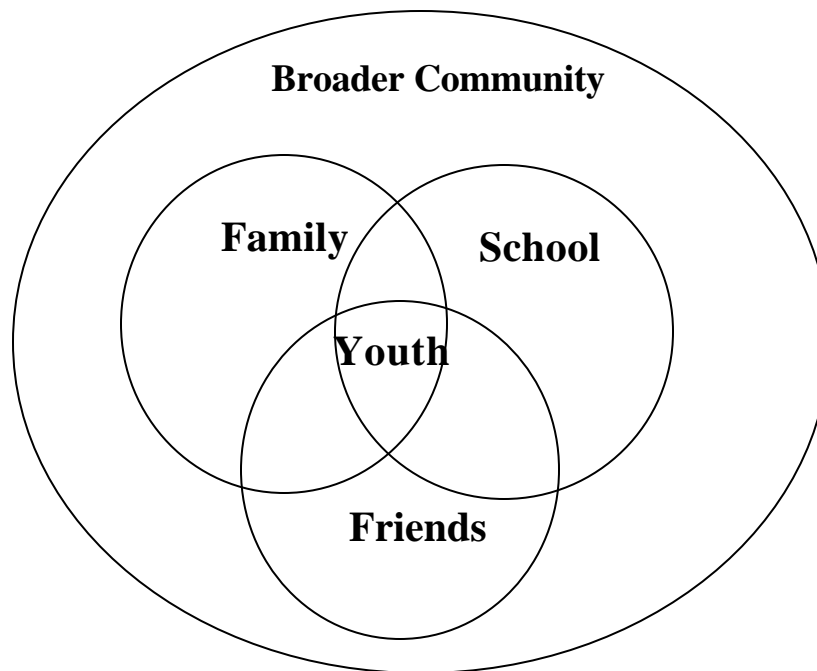


<sup>1</sup> Taylor, A. & Botchner, J. (1999) *Evaluation Handbook*. Centre for Research and Education in Human Services & Ontario Community Support Association.

## **2) Ecological (Recognizing influences on youth)**

We believe that understanding and addressing challenges faced by immigrant youth cannot be done in isolation of those areas which have an influence on their lives (see chart below). In other words, immigrant youth issues need to be placed in the context of their family, school, friends and broader community. Additionally, families, schools, friends and communities need to be a part of identifying the issues and in building the solutions. For this reason we involved family members, schools, service providers and other community members throughout our research process.

### **Spheres of Influence on Youth**



## **3) Non-experimental**

Our research was non-experimental. Although we were rigorous in our data collection and analysis and in seeking broad and diverse perspectives in our research, we did not attempt to find a representative sample of participants. Consequently, our results cannot be generalized to all immigrant youth within our community. We view our research not as an end in itself but as a much needed *start* in understanding issues faced by immigrant youth. It is also the start of finding region-wide solutions to better support immigrant youth.

## **Research Process**

This project was guided by a stakeholder-based steering committee made up of immigrant youth, family members and service providers (including settlement workers, people working with immigrants in schools and other youth service providers). A list of steering committee members can be found in the appendix. The committee met four times throughout the duration of the project.

Our community-based research experience has taught us the importance of having the various stakeholders guide the research process when developing an innovative project. In a sense, the steering committee represents a mini-laboratory of the broader community where the challenges of the intervention can be played out and tested before implementation. Facilitating such a group also creates momentum and increases the likelihood that findings will be acted upon.

The role of the steering committee was to give advice on all stages of the project, from participant recruitment and protocol development to developing concrete recommendations for future services and supports. Committee members also helped to co-facilitate focus groups and make presentations at the community forum.

The project involved five stages over the course of eight months:

### **1) Understanding the context**

During the first stage of the project, information was gathered about the demographics of immigrants and immigrant youth in Waterloo Region. An inventory of existing local services and supports for immigrant youth was also collected. Contacts with local service providers in this early stage served to broaden the support for the project.

### **2) Conducting focus group interviews**

During this stage of the project a total of 11 focus group interviews were held with youth (six groups), parents of immigrant youth (three groups), and service providers (two groups). The size of focus groups ranged from three to nine participants with a total of 61 people being interviewed.

Participants were recruited through a network of local service providers, school boards and steering committee members. We advertised the project and extended invitations on a local radio station. A presentation about the project was also made to English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers within the public school board. A recruitment flyer and form was given to all service providers and teachers recruiting participants (see appendix). Potential participants were asked to complete the recruitment form and return it to the Centre for Research and Education. Centre researchers then contacted each participant by telephone and followed-up with a letter and a copy of the questions prior to the interview.



support/services they would prefer. Protocols used in the focus groups can be found in the appendix.

In addition to these focus groups, we received short essays from 17 ESL high school students, detailing the challenges they faced while in Canada (see appendix for selected stories). These essays were written for an assignment for ESL class, and were used in this research with the consent of the students.

### **3) Holding a community forum**

During the next stage of the research, an opportunity was given for all focus group participants and other interested community members to meet together at a community forum. The purpose of this forum was to:

- 1) Share and discuss findings of the focus groups.
- 2) Prioritize strategies to support immigrant youth (the forum agenda can be found in the appendix).

To encourage community awareness and involvement, invitations to the forum were sent to various community members at the government, agency, and citizen levels, including the media and focus group participants (see appendix for forum flyer). Approximately 100 personal invitations were mailed out. A local radio station provided free advertising for the community forum. Focus group participants were also invited to the forum by telephone.

The forum was well attended. Despite a snowstorm earlier that day, 45 people showed up representing a good mix of various stakeholder groups and other community members. These included a local politician, a local television network, and a journalist from a regional newspaper (see article and photos in appendix).

Representatives of youth, family members and service providers were instrumental in carrying out the forum. For example, the summary of focus group findings was presented by youth and parents teamed with a researcher. Several youth read the stories of anonymous ESL students about being an immigrant youth.

After presenting the findings, the floor was opened to suggestions and comments from those in attendance. These comments were used to shape the emerging list of suggestions for supports. The list of supports was composed and participants were asked to indicate which they felt strongest about by placing two stickers beside the appropriate idea(s). The final list and the number of 'votes' assigned to each suggestion was compiled following the forum and presented to the steering committee to develop action steps.

At the end of the forum, those who were interested in continuing their involvement in the project beyond the present stage were asked to write their names and contact information on a list. Approximately 20 individuals signed up. This list was also passed on to the steering committee.

#### **4) Developing action steps**

The steering committee met following the community forum. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the supports and next steps. Those who had signed up at the forum were invited to attend this meeting.

The committee recognized that action steps should be diverse and comprehensive. For example, these steps should target different levels including the government/policy level, the education system level and the neighbourhood level. Action steps should also involve youth, parents and service providers. Finally, these steps should include a combination of formal services and informal supports.

The results of this discussion and the action steps developed are discussed in more detail in the final section of this report.

#### **5) Dissemination of products**

The final stage of this project is to disseminate the research findings. This has already begun in the following ways:

- ◆ A package of PowerPoint slides used at the community forum was given to all forum participants. Approximately 20 additional copies of this package have been distributed to other interested community members. Several participants and community members have expressed an interest in receiving the final report as well.
- ◆ A 10-minute live interview was conducted on a local radio station outlining the main findings of the research and advertised the community forum.
- ◆ A workshop presentation about the project and its findings was made at a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) conference. The conference was open to all ESL teachers in Waterloo and Oxford regions. The experiences shared by the teachers at the conference confirmed the focus group findings. Their responses and reactions re-affirmed the need for the project and for action to result from the project. The teachers indicated that the information was timely and that they would like final updates at its completion.
- ◆ A meeting with a local city councilor who requested information about the project, the findings and the implications for the local community.
- ◆ A brief presentation was made to Elinor Caplan, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to highlight issues arising from our research. This meeting was organized by the Settlement Research Monitoring Project that coordinated all eighteen CIC research projects in the province (of which our project was one).

- ◆ A one-page fact sheet was developed to briefly summarize the research findings and recommendations. These fact sheets will be distributed to service providers and other interested community members through educational events conducted by the Centre for Research and Education.

Following the end of the project (March 31) we plan to continue our dissemination in the following ways.

- ◆ The final report will be distributed to all steering committee members. The report will be made available to other interested parties as a publication of the Centre for Research and Education. The target audience for this report is general and includes immigrant groups, service providers, potential funders, and local politicians.
- ◆ Our local Refugee and Immigrant Concerns Committee invited us to participate in their Refugee Rights Day event on April 2<sup>nd</sup> by displaying information about this project.
- ◆ Our project was one of seven immigrant youth research projects in the province. A meeting will be held in April to share findings across these projects. The Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) will be organizing this meeting.
- ◆ Finally, we plan to disseminate the findings of the project through publications and presentations at appropriate conferences.

### **Overview of the Research Process**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Products</b>
1) Understanding the context	◆ Demographics about immigrant youth and services currently available.
2) Conducting focus group interviews	◆ Eleven groups: 6 with youth, 3 with parents, 2 with service providers. Total of 61 people interviewed.
3) Holding a community forum	◆ Presented findings and prioritized strategies for action.
4) Developing action steps	◆ Steering committee to develop and implement recommendations to enhance services and supports for immigrant youth.
5) Dissemination of products	◆ Through forum, media, workshop presentation, meetings with government representatives and other research groups, and written report and fact sheets distributed.

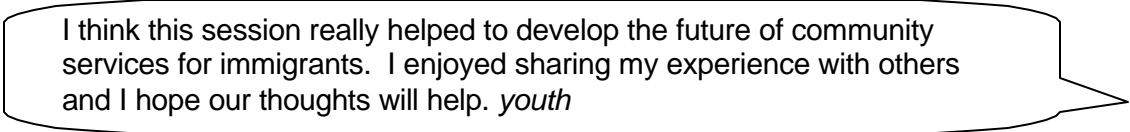
## **Evaluation of Research Process**

### **Reflections on focus groups**

At the completion of the project it was clear to the research team members that taking a flexible, participatory, and qualitative approach to collecting information was well suited to the nature of the project. Involving youth in any process can be a challenge as youth are often busy with school, social activities, work, family, and other interests. We found that it was important to be personal: first, to develop an invitation letter that was informative, simple, and welcoming; and second to contact youth in person to explain the nature of the project and encourage their involvement.

By including youth, parents of youth, and service providers throughout the research process, we had an opportunity to hear about youth issues from a variety of perspectives. Each stakeholder group had an opportunity to share their own experiences and perceptions and hear the same from others. This in turn helped develop a sense of ownership of the project across all stakeholder groups.

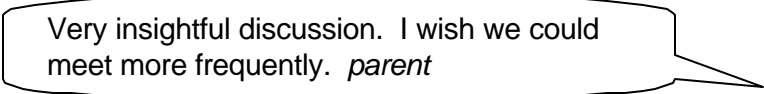
By bringing together the stakeholders in their own focus groups, we gave the participants a forum to share their experiences with others in a flexible environment. For example, focus groups provided youth with a opportunity for discussion that did not require the focus being on a specific person for a particular duration of time. The youth seemed to appreciate a chance to observe and listen. They were often instrumental in clarifying each other's comments and offering each other support. The youth were animated about the topic and about offering suggestions, again re-affirming their need for a forum to discuss these issues and have some involvement in finding solutions.



I think this session really helped to develop the future of community services for immigrants. I enjoyed sharing my experience with others and I hope our thoughts will help. *youth*

The groups appeared to be supportive and helpful in connecting youth with each other. In one particular case, several youth copied down each other's phone numbers at the end of the session so that they could continue their discussions and contacts in the future.

Focus groups seemed particularly therapeutic to parents who often reflected back on their own personal difficulties in immigrating to Canada.



Very insightful discussion. I wish we could meet more frequently. *parent*

Service providers, more than any other group, seemed to disagree a lot. Depending on where in the service sector they were situated, the providers had different takes on several issues. For instance, some suggested providing the services of translators and interpreters

to school teachers and administrators so that they could more effectively communicate their messages to immigrant youth and their parents. Others suggested that the school system needs to re-evaluate their messages to meet youth where they are. Discussions like these helped the participants recognize their different experiences and perceptions and the need to develop recommendations that are appreciative of them.

This is a very interesting discussion. Participants are very knowledgeable of the subject. Sharing is very valuable. *service provider*

I liked the opportunity for participation and the different opinions and ideas. *service provider*

Participants complained about not having enough time to discuss the issues. This highlights the need for providing opportunities for discussion and exploration of these support issues.

## **Reflections on Community Forum**

The forum was a time for celebration of cultural diversity and continued future planning. The forum was presented in an informal, inclusive manner, and was open to participants and other interested individuals and groups. This prompted a good, diverse mix of interests, backgrounds, and experiences. Subsequently, it created an excellent opportunity to present the findings back to participants, give them an opportunity to reflect further, as well as maintain the momentum of the action portion of the project. Two new businesses supported by a local Business Quest initiative for new Canadians were hired to provide food and music. As participants mingled and read through the project findings located on the walls, they were treated to ethnic foods and Latin American music.

Spots on local radio and television stations, as well as an article in the regional paper (see appendix) helped promote the forum beyond that night as an important contribution to and step in creating healthy communities that are appreciative of immigrant youth issues.

## **Research Findings**

The focus groups and community forum generated a wealth of information. This information was analyzed using a method called content analysis. This type of analysis is useful in finding emerging themes across different methods and across differing sources of information.

Research findings are summarized below under the following headings:

- ◆ Issues facing immigrant youth
- ◆ Present sources of support
- ◆ Suggestions for future support

### **Issues facing immigrant youth**

Past research on the adaptation of immigrant youth has shown that the experiences of immigrant youth in Canada vary a great deal (Hicks, Lalonde & Pepler, 1993). A number of risk and protective factors have been identified to give an indication of an adaptation process for an immigrant child or youth. (e.g., Garmey, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Beiser et al, 1988). For example, youth who have had interruptions in schooling, or who have parents reporting depression, may struggle to adapt to their new home. On the other hand, immigrant youth who quickly pick up the mainstream language, or have association with members of their own strong ethnic community likely have an advantage in adapting to Canada (Rumbaut, 1991; Ima & Hohm, 1991; Barankin, Konstantareas & deBosset, 1989).

The struggles that immigrant youth face while adapting to their new home country are many. Not only do they have to overcome the challenges shared by their parents (e.g., language proficiency and finding new networks of support), they also live in the context of challenging times for all youth. For example, the prospects for employment for immigrant youth, like youth across the country, are bleak. Yet immigrant youth face the additional barriers to employment shared by many immigrants as a whole (e.g., lack of Canadian work experience and discrimination).

The participants in our research project discussed these challenges in various ways. The following seven themes emerged from data analysis:

- ◆ Cultural differences
- ◆ Language
- ◆ Lack of resources
- ◆ Racism/discrimination
- ◆ Lack of communication
- ◆ Disappointment/disillusionment
- ◆ Other pressures

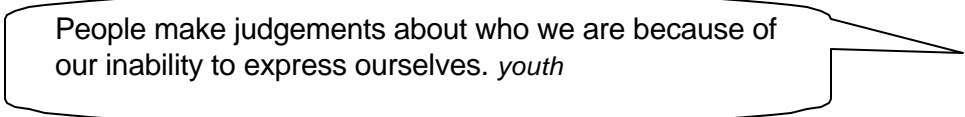
### **Cultural Differences**

Both youth and parents emphasized cultural differences. Youth talked about the challenges of adjusting to a different school system. Parents discussed the difficulties of adjusting to the different parenting styles in Canada. Both youth and parents highlighted their struggles adjusting to different dating expectations. Several youth also spoke of the different types of relationships that exist in Canada particularly between youth and elders, which to many of them is disrespectful.

Amid these cultural differences, youth feel caught between the two cultures of their old and new countries, and the competing loyalties of family and friends. Their two primary spheres of living (i.e., school life and family life) are regularly in contrast. What often results is a confusing competition of values and beliefs needed to guide them to meet the challenges of their lives.

### **Language**

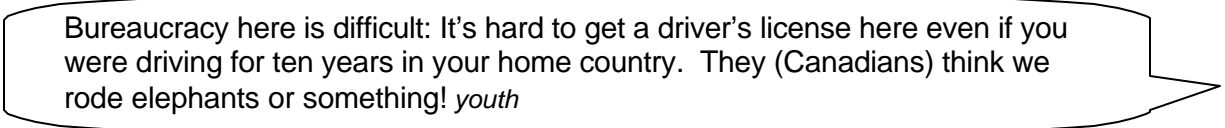
Language was a key issue. Youth highlighted that they often have trouble understanding their classes and their homework. Many youth used words like “I feel lost”, “stupid”, and “judged” because of their poor English skills and/or foreign accents. Teachers spoke about their difficulty in assessing grade levels. Parents expressed frustration about their inability to find work and therefore support their children due in part to their lack of English skills.



People make judgements about who we are because of our inability to express ourselves. *youth*

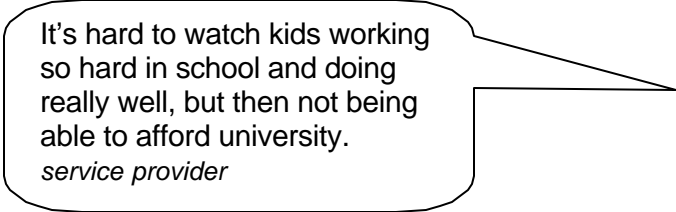
### **Lack of Resources**

Youth and their families most often come to Canada with few resources in the form of finances, family and community support, and knowledge of the Canadian system.



Bureaucracy here is difficult: It's hard to get a driver's license here even if you were driving for ten years in your home country. They (Canadians) think we rode elephants or something! *youth*

This, in addition to an inability to find work, cultural clashes, and language challenges, places immigrant youth in frustrating situations.



It's hard to watch kids working so hard in school and doing really well, but then not being able to afford university. *service provider*

Service providers expressed frustration due to the limited resources available, particularly for schools, to assist youth and/or parents with the types of supports they need. Service providers also highlighted that existing resources are not always accessible. One mother shared the example of being unable to attend parenting classes because she did not have the money to pay for a babysitter.

## **Racism/Discrimination**

Racism and discrimination are apparent in various ways. Service providers talked about the assumptions made about immigrant youth.

Teachers put limits on youths' capacities, saying that because they're immigrants and English is not their first language, they should be happy with lower marks. *service provider*

Youth talked about how immigrants are portrayed in the media and how they are teased at school but unable to defend themselves for fear of being punished. One youth felt that having to change her ethnic name so that Canadians can pronounce it was discrimination.

I am living in your world. You should be helping me, not making fun of me. *youth*

Parents expressed concern about how peers treated their children, several described incidents where they feared for their child's physical and emotional well-being.

Children of newcomers sometimes encounter unpleasant comments by other children in school. My daughter takes these things to heart and it effects her behaviour. *parent*

## **Lack of Communication**

Many youth don't want to 'bother' parents with their problems and so they don't tell them about any.

A lot of kids keep things bottled up because they are not given the opportunity to talk and they feel that they can't talk to peers or parents. *service provider*

Additionally, several service providers highlighted that schools do not communicate well with parents about curriculum and school procedures. Similarly schools and other services do not communicate well and therefore are not working together as efficiently and effectively as they could.

## **Disappointment/Disillusionment**

It was clear in the focus groups and the community forum that most immigrants to Canada were excited about the possibilities they would find when they arrived. However, several youth and parents described their disappointment after their arrival. For parents, this disappointment primarily stemmed from their inability to provide for their children. Youth most often discussed the lack of hospitality particularly among peers, lack of available resources, and cultural differences as primary motivators for their disappointment.

Youth are frustrated when they don't have the supports they need to succeed, because they really want to succeed. One student can't sleep at night because she is so worried about her future. *service provider*

It is important to note that in several focus groups the amount of disappointment expressed seemed somewhat dependent on how long the person has been living in Canada and what motivated them to immigrate here. Specifically, those who have been here for a number of years and those who had consciously chosen or been involved in the decision to move to Canada expressed less disillusionment.

Some youth are very excited about having a new life in Canada. Sometimes this is just a honeymoon period and reality hits them very hard. They suddenly feel that everything is going wrong and then they face depression. *service provider*

## **Other Pressures**

### *Leaving old friends and making new ones*

It was clear and not surprising that youth dislike leaving their old friends behind and making new ones, particularly since at the point they arrive many Canadians already have well-established social circles that are often hard to join.

Students stay in their own groups and don't try to get to know other people. In my home country, everyone wanted to be friends with the new student, but that is not true here. It's hard to break into groups. It took a lot of energy but eventually I did make friends. *youth*

Youth discussed the pressures they feel from the media and peers to 'conform' to Canadian culture expectations in order to build friendships.

You have to dress a certain way and be like the people you want to fit in with. I can't accept that. *youth*

### ***Staying connected with family***

Many youth also talked about the difficulties of keeping connected to family members who do not live in Canada. In many cases the pressures of moving and not being able to maintain regular contact has resulted in tense or broken relationships with family members both in Canada and in their home country.

I feel responsibility to maintain relationships with people from back home. I went back to visit this summer and expected everything to be the same and it wasn't. I had to get to know my family again and they are the most important people to me. The distance and time makes it hard to stay close with them. I feel so bad about this. I resent not knowing my own family. *youth*

### ***Isolation and loneliness***

Several youth expressed that they feel lonely and isolated. One youth commented that “four walls and a ceiling is all I have”. Canadian culture to her is very isolating. She explained that in her home country their houses are more open so you can always see and talk to community members. Being in a new and different country has left her feeling like she has no one; her new life consists of four walls and a ceiling.

### ***Role reversal***

Youth, parents and service providers all discussed the ‘role reversal’ phenomenon prevalent in most immigrant families. Youth do seem to catch on to the English language quicker than their parents and they are also exposed to the school system and other Canadians on a more regular basis. Subsequently, many youth become interpreters, problem-solvers, and resources for their parents.

Hard times made me grow up. *youth*

Being a youth is a challenge in and of itself. Being an immigrant youth, as highlighted above, adds many more dimensions to that challenge. It is evident that these youth require unique supports to assist them in meeting that challenge effectively.

### **Present sources of support**

Focus group participants indicated some areas of current supports for immigrant youth. Most supports mentioned were informal in nature and came from such sources as friends,

family, people within their own ethnic community, faith communities, and other community members. Immigrant youth found the most support coming from their peers (immigrant and non-immigrant). Interestingly, parents did not see friends as being a major positive influence on their children.

A kid who never talks in class can be so free and have so much fun when involved in social events. Sometimes tears come to my eyes watching them have genuine fun—it's totally different than what they experience in class. *service provider*

My family is closer here. We talk a lot about our struggles here. *youth*

As I got friends, it got easier for me. *youth*

Immigrant youth had trouble finding help beyond their natural supports. This was due in part to a sense of overwhelming confusion (cultural, language, and personal barriers). This confusion made it hard for newcomer youth to find appropriate ways of addressing their needs and issues.

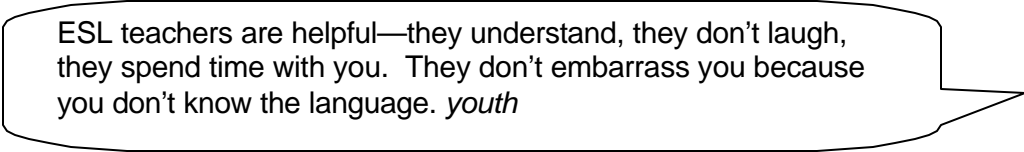
You don't even know what you need help with; you just need help with everything. *youth*

Participants also said that there were few formal services from settlement and mainstream organizations available to immigrant youth. Some formal services that did exist had recently lost their funding (e.g., ESL summer school programs). Those mainstream formal services that did exist were sometimes inaccessible because of language, financial and/or various cultural barriers.

There are no summer ESL school programs any more. There's too much free time in the summer and more isolation. *service provider*

There is a lack of support for immigrant youth in their own language. *service provider*

Both parents and youth discussed the importance of ESL teachers in facilitating youths' transition to a new culture and school system. Parents exclusively discussed the importance of community centres and faith communities in initiating recreational events, providing basic resources to the family or developing educational supports for youth.



ESL teachers are helpful—they understand, they don't laugh, they spend time with you. They don't embarrass you because you don't know the language. *youth*

The chart below summarizes the different sources of support mentioned by focus group participants. They have been organized following the spheres of influence highlighted earlier in this report. So for instance, friends, followed by families are the closest spheres of support for youth. These in turn are preceded by youths' immediate community (i.e. schools, faith communities) and the broader community, both informal and formal. For each support examples are listed as well as limitations.

## Summary of Present Sources of Support

<b>Spheres of Influence</b>	<b>Source of Support</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<b>Friends</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Emotional and social support within own and across different cultures</li> <li>◆ Provide orientation to new culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Get involved with wrong ‘crowd’ (e.g., gangs)</li> <li>◆ Less incentive to make new friends when peers are only those of own culture</li> </ul>
<b>Family</b>	<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Emotional support</li> <li>◆ Empathy</li> <li>◆ Share experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Financial hardship (e.g., unemployment)</li> <li>◆ Parents have slower cultural integration</li> <li>◆ Parents “worry too much”</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>	<b>ESL Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Helpful, supportive (“Teachers here are friends”)</li> <li>◆ Understanding</li> <li>◆ Action-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teachers do not all share the same approach to supporting immigrant youth integration</li> </ul>
	<b>Informal Supports in Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Social events (e.g., movie, multicultural nights, dances)</li> <li>◆ Recreational events (e.g., sports, camps, other gatherings)</li> <li>◆ Host Program (befriending)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Few to begin with but now diminishing due to funding depletion</li> </ul>
<b>Broader Community</b>	<b>Own Cultural/Ethnic Groups and Faith Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Help with basic community orientation</li> <li>◆ Can offer social support that is culturally appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mixed messages: “Don’t forget old culture’s ways” yet “Important to become Canadian”</li> <li>◆ May be barriers to cultural change</li> </ul>
	<b>Formal Community Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Settlement Services</li> <li>◆ Interpretation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Scarce</li> <li>◆ Adult-centred</li> </ul>
	<b>Other Community Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ "Homework club"</li> <li>◆ Offering space for events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Scarce</li> </ul>

In summary, although various supports do exist in the community for youth and for immigrants, many of them are inaccessible due to lack of financial resources, fragmentation, or an exclusive emphasis on adults.

## **Suggestions for future supports**

The various stakeholder groups made suggestions for future support during the focus group sessions. The collection of these suggestions was presented to participants at the open forum for feedback. They had the opportunity to add to the suggestions and then each chose two strategies that they thought were most important to focus on. These were compiled into a list and presented at a follow-up steering committee meeting.

The suggestions are listed below in order of priority give by forum participants. Again organized according to their fit within the different spheres of influence highlighted earlier. That is, they are aimed at:

- ◆ Youth and their friends
- ◆ Family (primarily parents)
- ◆ Schools
- ◆ Broader community.

### ***Youth and friends***

All three stakeholders talked about the importance of informal support to youth. This was presented in terms of facilitating social opportunities and peer support among youth to help immigrant youth gain a better understanding the Canadian context and culture and to build Canadian friendships.

Immigrant youth should get help from Canadian youth. *youth*

We have to provide structured opportunities for immigrant and mainstream youth to mix, to get to know each other. Sports is a very good vehicle for this - it breaks down barriers. *service provider*

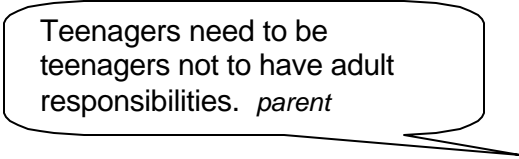
Other specific examples presented in the focus groups and the forum are:

- ◆ Summer language camps for youth
- ◆ Tutoring from immigrant youth
- ◆ Get youth together to define "services" and "supports" for youth
- ◆ Support groups for youth
- ◆ Recreational and social opportunities to make friends
- ◆ Field trips to see Canada
- ◆ Community place to connect with other youth
- ◆ Cross-cultural exchange evenings
- ◆ Information for youth about Canadian culture/context

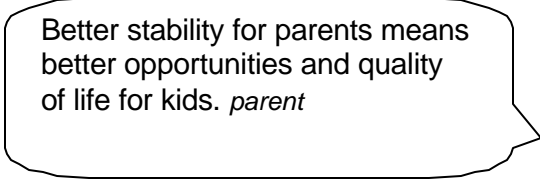
### ***Support to parents***

It was evident in the focus groups that parents who have immigrated to Canada face many of their own difficulties. Understandably, their difficulty in finding work, earning a steady income, and learning about the Canadian culture themselves, affect their children as well. As highlighted in the earlier section on present supports for immigrant youth, new Canadian families are limited in how much they can help children because of things like financial hardship, slower cultural integration and knowledge, and a sense of concern for children in a strange environment.

It was not surprising therefore that the majority of participants talked about the importance of providing supports to parents so that they will be in a better position to support their children.



Teenagers need to be teenagers not to have adult responsibilities. *parent*



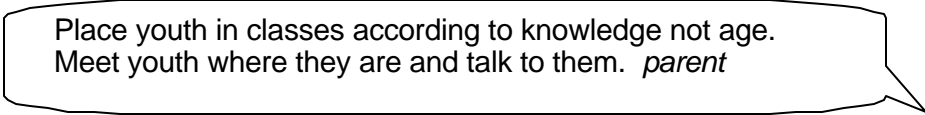
Better stability for parents means better opportunities and quality of life for kids. *parent*

Additional suggestions for supports for parents included:

- ◆ Adults need jobs and opportunities to network
- ◆ Parents need opportunities to learn practical English
- ◆ Informal supports to parents, recreational and social opportunities
- ◆ Parents need networks to connect with Canadians
- ◆ Parents need to have information
- ◆ Summer language camps for parents

### ***School system***

It was not surprising that mostly youth talked about the need to improve the school system. They stressed that school is an important place to learn, interact and also help children with their problems. Subsequently, it is important that the school environment promote these qualities in an effective and successful way.



Place youth in classes according to knowledge not age.  
Meet youth where they are and talk to them. *parent*

Further comments on this topic and ideas for improving the school system are presented in the following list:

- ◆ School is an important place for youth and parents
- ◆ Develop ESL classes for concrete subjects
- ◆ Integrate ESL classes with the rest of the school
- ◆ Include immigrant parents on school councils
- ◆ Make school more fun
- ◆ Teachers need to meet youth where they are and understand the situation from which they come
- ◆ Include co-op opportunities for youth to gain Canadian experience

### ***Broader Community***

Primarily youth and parents talked about the larger Canadian context. They explained that the attitudes and perceptions of immigrants are just as important (and potentially harmful) as the actual types of provisions and supports that are set up for immigrants. Their suggestions were related to support for Canadians to change their attitudes and increase their knowledge about immigration, multiculturalism, cultural meaning and respect:

Children repeat what they hear and learn at home. *parent*

- ◆ Create regional immigrant youth council and strategy/plan
- ◆ Agencies self-examine how to transform themselves to be responsive to immigrant youth
- ◆ Continue research on immigrant youth
- ◆ Linking schools with broader community - "centre"
- ◆ Disseminate research findings to youth group, Regional Council and policy makers
- ◆ Need a "broker" group to coordinate strategies
- ◆ Support Canadians to learn about immigration, cultural meanings and respect for tradition
- ◆ Identify access barriers
- ◆ Make decision-makers sensitive to immigrant youth issues
- ◆ Educate Canadians to not make assumptions about people based on language abilities
- ◆ Canadian and immigrant parents to talk about raising kids (as partners)
- ◆ Community place to learn about each other
- ◆ Opportunities to play together
- ◆ Regional plan - commitment

It is evident that the various stakeholders involved in the project feel that informal networks of supports are most needed to immigrant youths' issues. It was also stressed that the main impetus must come from youth and therefore must be relevant to their situations and interests. These issues were kept in mind as final recommendations were developed.

## **Action Steps**

The steering committee met following the community forum to discuss the proposed action steps and make concrete plans to implement them. To encourage the involvement and ownership of youth, additional youth and their parents were invited to the committee meeting.

Based on the action steps suggested by members of the forum and focus groups, and taking into consideration their prioritization, the group developed three action steps that are aimed at different levels within society:

- ◆ Local government/policy level
- ◆ Educational system level
- ◆ Grassroots community or neighbourhood level

These steps are:

### **A. Forming A Regional Immigrant Youth Council**

- ◆ Five immigrant youth have taken on this challenge. They are planning to link up with other youth in the area and regional government resources.

### **B. Board of Education Presentation**

- ◆ Two delegations, one of youth and one of parents, are requesting an audience with the public school board trustees. They plan to make concrete suggestions about how the local school system can better respond to the needs of immigrant youth.

### **C. Demonstration Projects (to be developed in Cambridge and Kitchener/Waterloo)**

- ◆ Two activities are in the works to address immigrant youth issues at the community level. One is the development of a series of peer support activities across the region. The other is to work with three local neighbourhoods as demonstrations of inclusive communities and schools. Both of these activities will be youth directed.

Over the next few months committee and community members are meeting to turn these action steps into reality. Youth will play an important role in implementing each of the steps.

## **Conclusion**

This project was developed in response to a lack of research exploring the issues immigrant youth face in Canada. There is a diverse immigrant population in Waterloo Region yet there are gaps in supports for immigrant youth. The purpose of this research project was two-fold: 1) to understand the diverse settlement issues of immigrant youth

(aged 16-20) within Waterloo Region, and 2) to develop specific and concrete strategies for supporting youth to address their issues.

The findings from the project indicate that the issues that immigrant youth face are diverse and complex. They include: adjusting to cultural and language differences; dealing with racism and disillusionment; and dealing with a lack of resources and communication. Most existing supports for immigrant youth are informal in nature (e.g. friends, family). Few formal services for immigrant youth exist. Of those that do, ESL teachers were seen as key in helping youth's transition to a new culture and the school system.

Suggestions for future support emphasized: support to youth (e.g., peer mentoring, social/recreational opportunities); support to parents (e.g., opportunities to connect with other parents); improvement of schools (e.g., integration of ESL, parents on school councils); and improvement of society (e.g., multicultural events, public education).

The participatory action research approach used in this research project resulted in developing comprehensive action steps based on participants' suggestions. The resulting action steps touch on different levels within our society: the local government/policy level, the educational system level, and the grassroots community or neighbourhood level. Youth remain integrally involved by working closely with steering committee members to develop and implement these action steps.

## **Appendices**

- ◆ Selected 1996 Census Data for Waterloo Region
- ◆ Steering Committee Members
- ◆ Participant Recruitment Flyer and Form
- ◆ Demographic Highlights of Focus Group Participants
- ◆ Focus Group Protocols
- ◆ Selected Stories from ESL Immigrant Youth
- ◆ Community Forum Flyer
- ◆ Community Forum Agenda
- ◆ Forum newspaper article and pictures
- ◆ About the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

## Selected 1996 Census Data for Waterloo Region

	Number	Percent
Total population	405,435	
Total immigrants	84,700	
United Kingdom	14,220	16.79%
Portugal	9,115	10.76%
Germany	6,460	7.63%
Poland	4,945	5.84%
Former Yugoslavia	3,525	4.16%
United States	3,435	4.06%
Romania	3,200	3.78%
India	2,735	3.23%
Viet Nam	2,630	3.11%
Recent immigrants (1991-1996)	12,690	
Former Yugoslavia	1,045	8.23%
Poland	990	7.80%
Romania	985	7.76%
India	775	6.11%
Viet Nam	760	5.99%
El Salvador	600	4.73%
United Kingdom	535	4.22%
China	450	3.55%
United States	435	3.43%
Guyana	425	3.35%
Somalia	420	3.31%
Immigrants by age	84,700	
0-4 years	10,215	12.06%
5-19 years	25,060	29.59%
20 years +	49,430	58.36%
Home language	401,725	
English	351,275	89.12%
German	7,485	18.12%
Portuguese	7,015	16.98%
Polish	3,325	8.05%
Spanish	3,070	7.43%
Chinese	2,245	5.43%
Vietnamese	2,175	5.26%
Romanian	2,120	5.13%
Visible minority population	34,050	8.48%
South Asian	8,115	23.83%
Black	5,790	17.00%
South East Asian	4,645	13.64%
Latin American	4,420	12.98%
Chinese	4,290	12.60%
Arab/West Asian	2,790	8.19%

Source: Statistics Canada



Centre for Research & Education in Human Services

## Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region

# Steering Committee Members

- ◆ Eliseo A. Martell (Parent and Community Health Department)
- ◆ Alisa Sivak (K-W Multicultural Centre)
- ◆ Maria Alvarez (Parent and Cross Cultural and Community Services)
- ◆ Cynthia Fischer (Kitchener ESL teacher)
- ◆ Debbie Samson (Cambridge ESL teacher)
- ◆ Minh Ha (Youth and Waterloo Region District School Board)
- ◆ Kate Ochocki (Youth)
- ◆ Milica Djeric (Youth)
- ◆ Maedith Raedlin (Parent)

### **Ex-officio**

- ◆ Theron Kramer (Ontario Trillium Foundation)
- ◆ Lyle Pearson (Waterloo Region District School Board)
- ◆ Colin Armstrong (Waterloo Region District School Board)



# Immigrant/Refugee Youth in Waterloo Region

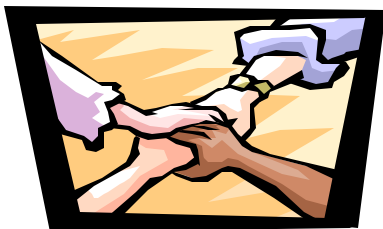
## Participants Wanted

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services is carrying out a needs assessment of recent immigrant and refugee youth (aged 16-20) in Waterloo Region. The goal is to understand the challenges facing immigrant and refugee youth and find ways to address them.

We will be talking with a total of nine groups of people across the region. Some of the groups will be for immigrant and refugee youth, some for parents, and others for service providers. These groups are an opportunity for you to talk with about eight other people about what it's like for young immigrants and refugees to live in Canada.

You will be paid \$15 if you participate in one of these groups. Groups will be held in three locations: 1) Kitchener downtown YMCA in Market Square, 2) Waterloo YMCA, and 3) Cambridge YMCA.

Complete the form on the back of this page and fax it back to the Centre for Research and Education (741-8262).



*Centre for Research & Education in Human Services*

26 College Street, Kitchener, Ontario N2H 4Z9

Phone: (519) 741-1318 Fax: (519) 741-8262

Email: [cfre@kw.igs.net](mailto:cfre@kw.igs.net)

Web page: <http://www.crehs.on.ca>

"Building Bridges within Communities"

## ✓ Check the one group you want to attend

If you're an **immigrant/refugee youth** (age 16-20)

Circle the time  
that works best  
↓

- ✓
- |   |                             |             |                |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> male/female together | at the Waterloo YMCA        | November 22 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> male only            | at the Kitch. downtown YMCA | November 24 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> male/female together | at the Cambridge YMCA       | November 30 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> female only          | at the Kitch. downtown YMCA | December 2  | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |

If you're a **parent** of an immigrant/refugee youth (age 16-20)

Circle the time  
that works best  
↓

- ✓
- |   |                             |             |                |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> male only            | at the Kitch. downtown YMCA | November 22 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> male/female together | at the Waterloo YMCA        | November 23 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> female only          | at the Cambridge YMCA       | November 18 | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |

If you're a **service provider** for immigrant/refugee youth (age 16-20)

Circle the time  
that works best  
↓

- ✓
- |  |                             |             |                |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ESL teachers      | at the Kitch. downtown YMCA | December 2  | 4-6pm or 7-9pm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service Providers | at the Kitch. downtown YMCA | November 25 | 3-5pm or 7-9pm |

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Year of arrival to Canada \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature , if required \_\_\_\_\_ Best time of day to call you \_\_\_\_\_

Interpreter required? If so, what language? \_\_\_\_\_

Fax this form back to the Centre for Research and Education (741-8262). Holly will call you back to confirm the time and place with you. We will also mail you a copy of the questions we will be asking.



Centre for Research & Education in Human Services

# Immigrant/Refugee Youth in Waterloo Region

## Youth Focus Group Questions

1. Can you tell us what it was like when you first arrived in Canada and what have been some of the major issues you have dealt with?
2. What ways, if any, has your move to Canada affected your relationship with your family? with your friends?
3. Can you tell us the people and places that have been particularly helpful to you in becoming comfortable in Canada? Who do immigrants and refugees your age turn to for help in dealing with their concerns?
4. What kind of help would you suggest there be for immigrant and refugees your age? What would these supports look like?
5. What makes it difficult for you to get the help you want or need? What makes it easy for you to get the help you want or need?



# Immigrant/Refugee Youth in Waterloo Region

## Parent Focus Group Questions

1. Can you tell us what it was like when your children first arrived in Canada and what have been some of the major issues that they have dealt with?
2. What ways, if any, has your move to Canada affected your children's relationship with you? with their friends?
3. Can you tell us the people and places that have been particularly helpful to your children in becoming comfortable in Canada? Who do immigrant youth turn to for help in dealing with their concerns?
4. What kind of help would you suggest there be for immigrant and refugees who are the age of your children? What would these supports look like?
5. What makes it difficult for your children to get the help they want or need? What makes it easy for your children to get the help they want or need?



# Immigrant/Refugee Youth in Waterloo Region

## Service Provider Focus Group Questions

1. Can you tell us what it is like for immigrant and refugee youth when they first arrive in Canada, and describe some of the major issues they face?
2. What ways, if any, has the move to Canada affected the relationship immigrant and refugee youth have with their family with their friends?
3. Who do immigrant youth turn to for help in dealing with their concerns? What people and places have been particularly helpful to immigrant and refugee youth in becoming comfortable in Canada?
4. What kind of services and supports would you suggest there be for immigrant and refugee youth? What would these services and supports look like?
5. What makes it difficult for immigrant and refugee youth to get the help they want or need? What makes it easy for immigrant and refugee youth to get the help they want or need?



# Demographics of Focus Group Participants

## *Overall*

**Number of groups held** =11  
**Number of participants** = 61  
**Female** = 44  
**Male** = 17

## *Service Providers*

**Number of groups held** =2 (1=ESL, 1=other)  
**Number of participants** = 14  
**Female** = 11, **Male** = 3  
**Organizations represented:** Public Board, Catholic Board, K-W Counseling/KW Multicultural Centre, Kitchener Community Health Centre, YMCA (Cambridge & Kitchener)

## *Youth and Parents*

	Youth Focus Groups	Parent Focus Groups
<b>Number of focus groups held</b>	6	3
<b>Special characteristics of some focus groups</b>	male only=1, female only=1 ESL students only=2	Somali only=1
<b>Size of groups</b>	3-6 participants	5-6 participants
<b>Total participants</b>	30	17
<b>Female</b>	22	11
<b>Male</b>	8	6
<b>Age</b>	13=1 16=5 18=8 15=5 17=9 19=2	20-29=1 40-49=8 30-39=4 50-59=4
<b>Siblings/Children</b>	range=0-8, mean=2.8	range=1-13, mean=3.7
<b>Present home city</b>	Kitchener=24 Waterloo=3 Cambridge=3	Kitchener=11 Waterloo=1 Cambridge=4 Hamilton=1
<b>Birthplace by country</b>	Former Yug.=10 Chile=1 Vietnam=4 Nicaragua=1 Afganistan=2 Hong Kong =1 Korea=2 Ethiopia=1 Iran=2 India=1 Iraq=2 Botswana=1 Slovak Rep.=1 Sudan=1	Somalia=7 Tanzania=1 Former Yug.=2 Poland=1 India=2 Romainia=1 Brava=1 Afghanistan=1 Nicaragua=1
<b>Birthplace by world region</b>	Africa=3 Europe=11 Asia=14 Latin America=2	Africa=9 Europe=4 Asia=3 Latin America=1
<b>Home language (some multiple responses)</b>	Serbian/Bosnian=10 Korean=2 Farsi=4 Assyrian=2 Vietnamese=3 Slovak=1 Arabic=2 English=1 Gujarati=2 Chinese=1 Dari=2 Ethiopian=1 Spanish=2 German=1	Somali=7 Romanian=1 English=6 Spanish=1 Arabic=3 Polish=1 Serbian/Bosnian=2 Farsi=1 Hungarian=1 Bravan=1
<b>Comfort with English</b>	Very=10 Somewhat=14 Not=6	Very=8 Somewhat=8 Not=1
<b>Year entered Canada</b>	1989=1 1995=3 1998=7 1993=1 1996=6 1999=5 1994=2 1997=5	1990=2 1993=2 1996=3 1991=1 1994=2 1997=2 1992=2 1995=1 1998=1
<b>Present education status</b>	All full time high school	Full time school=1 Part time school=4 (3=ESL)
<b>Present work status</b>	Part time job=4	Full time job=5 Part time job=7 No job=4

# Selected Stories from ESL Immigrant Youth

## Student #1

As an immigrant I face many challenges like different community and culture and meeting new people to grow up with. As an immigrant youth I faced problems like I couldn't speak the language, do the stuff Canadians or others do, not wear the same clothes. But eventually you get over these things because they will change towards you and understand the way you are, or will change to the way they are living which ever fits you better. But after a long time you will feel like you are at home, nothing is bothering you, and you will feel normal.

Other problems may be teachers are treating you different than others because of your background. And some times you don't get to hang around people that you want because you're not accepted because they have an idea about your background. The good thing is that people might LOVE you because they want to learn about the style you live and the way you talk and any ways, women love the accent on a guy. So there is a good side and a bad side to being an immigrant so it's not ugly because there is a pretty side to it.

That's my point of view. Other fellow students might no agree with my point but that's the problems I personally ran in to when I got to Canada 3.5 years ago. So I know what it's like but I got over these problems.

## Student #3

As an immigrant youth I face many challenges. In my country I didn't study much English. When I came here it is very difficult for me. I didn't understand any words. It was boring when I came. This is the new world to me. Everything seemed strange to me and this is a free country. Many things are different from my country. The weather is different and the way people dress is different. The first day when I came, I saw snow. It was amazing to me. I never saw such a thing in my life. My whole life is changing, I came here to live with my brother-in-law and my sister. This is a free country but I don't have any freedom at all.

## Student #4

As an immigrant youth I face many challenges. Arrival in Canada has changed many things. I was forced to face different problems. The first and the worst was language. You can't do any thing without it. In one moment I could do anything and in the other I couldn't understand what people say. In a way it was shock for me. I felt so weak. Also I had other problems like new climate, no friends. It was like alone on island far from every person I know. But I decided to change things. My first school in Canada was in Quebec. Professors didn't understand us at all. Some of them behaved like we were war criminals. But fortunately it lasted only one year, then I moved to Kitchener where situation is completely different. Teachers do everything to help us and I appreciated it. Now with good friends and teachers most of my problems are solved.

## Student #7

What challenges did I an immigrant youth face? First, but not the toughest barrier is language. Some of as have had studied English in their countries, but to understand English and to speak English are two different things. No one can help you with this, it just takes times. Secondly, I'm torn between Canada and my country. I feel that I'm not being loyal to Poland when I like Canada. I'm frightened about my future—what to do, where to go when I finish my high school. Will my English be good enough for any University in Canada. Or will my knowledge be big enough for any University in Poland?

Social life, well it's not an issue for me. I don't care about what people say, I just do my best to learn as much as possible. I have a few friends who I stick to and I'm absolutely satisfied with this. But I can see, that there are some ESL students billing themselves to be more popular, more respected—they get on to a soccer team or smoke in front of the school. The fact that they're not “good enough” to be the king or the queen of the school is depressing for some of them.

I would never complain about the way I'm treated here. I've heard about racists--stupid people who do their best to make immigrants break down. However, this never happened to me. That's my case. Unfortunately, I'm like an exception. Lot's of my friends suffered a great deal of prejudice. God, that really hurts!

### **Student #16**

As an immigrant youth I experience a lot of challenges. First challenge is to learn how to live in the place where you're at. Second thing is language. That's OK when you have parents with you. But another problem begins when starting high school. Some Canadian kids are being mean to us immigrants. Same with the teachers. Some teachers are being mean. All of them say no racism, but they all actually do it. I personally am very disappointed in Canada. Canada is nice and free country, but I'd rather want to be in Yugoslavia without food like I was for 7 years. It's really hard when you're here, strange world, everything so different, and then you find out that you're not wanted here.

All of the people are saying no racism, we're all the same. But they don't mean it. Same with the teachers. Some of them treat you like you're nothing and nobody. Some of them think that we're stupid and we don't know to talk back, and some of them think that we don't understand enough. Anyway, they think, some of them, that we're stupid. You know it really bothers me. I hate when a person with a smile is telling horrible things to me and a smiling like we're talking about heaven! All I'm telling you is, people are the one that make me cry. It's the truth I have everything here. I thank Canada for saving my life, that she welcomed me and my parents and sister. But there's something that bothers me. And all I'm saying, some people are bad racists.

### **Student #17**

As an immigrant youth I face many challenges. Life in Canada is not easy for an immigrant youth. I came to Canada on December 27, 1996. On the first day I was scared about everything. During that time I only wanted to go back to my country. I think you know why! In that time I didn't have any friends. I couldn't speak English and didn't know anything about Canada. I didn't know what to do.

I was incredibly homesick. I cried in my room a lot. At that time, I though Canada was very bad. The first day I came to school, I was really, really scared. I only knew how to say “hi” , “bye” and “what your name?” and things like that.

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## Community Forum Announcement

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### Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region Kitchener City Hall - Conestoga Room

**Monday, February 14, 2000  
6:00-9:00pm**

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services is holding a community forum on challenges facing immigrant youth in Waterloo Region. This forum is part of an eight-month action-oriented research project involving members of the community to suggest new services and supports for immigrant youth.

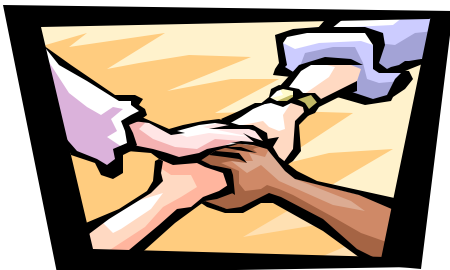
Funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the project is guided by a Steering Committee of immigrant youth, parents, and service providers already supporting immigrant youth. It is one of seven projects across the province.

Eleven focus groups have already been held asking youth, parents and service providers about the challenges youth face, where they presently turn to for support, and suggestions about how they can better be supported. The community forum will give an opportunity to share preliminary findings and to prioritize future steps of action. The forum will be held on February 14, 2000 at the Kitchener City Hall from 6:00-9:00pm. Multicultural refreshments will be provided.

The Centre for Research and Education is a leader in participatory action research in Canada. Located in downtown Kitchener, the Centre is committed to developing communities and human services that are responsive and supportive, especially to people with limited access to power and opportunity.

For more information contact Joanna Ochocka or Rich Janzen at (519) 741-1318.

**All are welcome!**



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*"Building Bridges with Communities"*

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**Community Forum  
on  
Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region**

**Kitchener City Hall  
Monday, February 14, 2000  
6:00-9:00pm**

**Agenda**

1. Mingle Time: Multicultural food and viewing displays of findings on walls
2. Welcome and background to project
3. Reading of stories from ESL students
4. Presentation of findings/Adding to the findings
  - Issues faced
  - Existing supports
  - Suggested strategies of support
5. Prioritizing strategies - dotmocracy
6. Next steps and closing



# Immigrant experiences related at K-W forum

By Joel Rubinoff

RECORD STAFF

Chilean native Maite Retamales sums up the teenaged immigrant experience in Waterloo Region this way:

"It's a lot of emotional stress," says the 19-year-old high school student, attending a community forum Monday on challenges facing immigrant youth in Waterloo Region.

"I had no friends and it's so easy to be mean - especially when you don't understand why the people next to you (are different). I'd go to camp with all these Canadian kids with all their Nike shoes and I felt like a geek."

There were also conflicting pressures on Retamales - who immigrated to Waterloo Region with her single mom about 10 years ago - to fit in with her non-immigrant peers, maintain her own heritage and transcend the language barrier at school

And then there were battles with her mother over issues like premarital sex, drugs and dating.

Immigrants treat these things as end-of-the-world issues," says Retamales. "They don't sit down and talk to you about it. You're shaming the family"

On top of this, there's "an expectation that you have to succeed."

"She basically gave up her life for me - and (immigrant parents) tell you that, too," says Retamales. "My mom expects me to go to university and get this great job and be successful and to have a good life."

Though she has no problem with this, she wants it to be on her own terms.

I like art, but my mom is more 'You should become a lawyer.' But I think success and happiness are different categories."

These were but a few of the many concerns articulated by about 40 teenagers, parents, teachers and community workers attending the forum, hosted by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services.

Federally funded, the forum was part of an eight-month research project to define "the challenges facing immigrant youth and come up with strategies to deal with them.

With the fourth highest percentage of immigrants in Canada, and with 42 per cent of them under age 20, it's an issue especially pivotal in Waterloo Region.

Among the audience suggestions:

- Create a regional youth council.
- Provide recreational opportunities for immigrant youths to socialize
- Encourage social agencies to be more responsive to immigrant youth.
- Link school programs for immigrants with the broader community
- In schools, provide more integration of English as a Second Language programs with the study of core subjects.
- Pair up youths with fellow immigrants as tutors.
- Set up cross-cultural exchange evenings

The centre will hand the data over to a steering committee for study and an eventual list of recommendations.

**Insert photo file here**

# About the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services



The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services is an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 1982. Located in Kitchener, Ontario, we are overseen by a board of directors which includes academics, service providers, and consumers of health and social services. We maintain a network of innovators in human services from across the country, and often draw members of this network into our projects. Through research, education, policy analysis, facilitation and planning we believe we can play a unique and worthwhile role in developing communities that are responsive and supportive, especially to people with limited access to power and opportunity, including immigrants.

The Centre for Research and Education has extensive experience in community-based research, with a particular focus on **promising and innovative practices** in human services. We are comfortable with and value researching innovative ideas and practices whether they be formal professional services, informal supports (e.g., self help/mutual aid groups), or a combination of the two (e.g., support clusters). We design our research to enable researchers and the people working on an intervention to work closely together. This approach allows the research to play an integral and meaningful role in informing and influencing an evolving demonstration project.

Our approach to evaluation is highly **participatory**. We try to work in ways which bring different groups of stakeholders together and provide an opportunity for those who are less powerful to voice their opinions and influence decision making. A stakeholder committee typically guides our projects, and stakeholders often participate in the data gathering and analysis as well as designing the research.

Our approach to research is also **action-oriented**. We work to make our research as useful as possible to those who participate in them, and share our findings on an ongoing basis. We believe that research is more meaningful if they are undertaken with the goal of fostering positive social change in our communities and our society. In this way, the process of conducting research becomes a means for positive change. In other words, the research itself becomes an intervention.

The Centre for Research and Education has carried out numerous research projects and consultations related to **settlement** issues over its sixteen year history. From the *K-W Refugee Resettlement Evaluation* (a review to improve refugee services and structures in Kitchener-Waterloo) in 1984, to more recent projects working with immigrant groups around specific issues, the Centre has helped communities across Ontario respond to the diverse settlement needs of recent immigrants.

Many of our research projects have also focused on **youth** issues. Examples include an evaluation of a community development project in a multicultural inner city neighbourhood of Toronto (*Community Project for Healthy Childhood Development*), or interviewing youth and their parents across the province (*Best Practices for Involving Parents and Youth Using Children's Services*).

For more information about the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services contact us (see telephone, fax, email and website below). We would be happy to provide a copy of our publications listing, resume or flyer.



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