

Calgary Herald - July 11, 2009

\$9.5M in language training announced

Federal Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said Friday he wants more immigrants in Canada to learn one of the country's official languages and expects them to better integrate into Canadian society.

In Calgary to announce \$9.5 million in funding for language training programs in the city, Kenney said the government expects all immigrants to speak French or English if they are to become Canadian citizens. But only a quarter of them are taking advantage of government-funded language courses -- even though it's a "critical pathway to success in Canada."

The additional funding for settlement services, expected to benefit about 13,000 Calgarians, will help with the transition to Canadian society, he said, but noted that "integration is a two-way street."

"Newcomers have a right to be different, but a duty to integrate. They also have to take the initiative," Kenney told reporters at the Calgary Immigrant Educational Society.

"Our new focus is on integration. We don't want to create a bunch of silo communities where kids grow up in a community that more resembles their parents' country of origin than Canada," he added. "We want people to be Canadians first and foremost, to be proud of and maintain their own tradition and heritage, but not at the price of developing Canadian identity."

Din Ladak, CEO of Immigrant Services Calgary, said newcomers to Canada arrive with a strong desire to better their lives, but often lack the necessary resources and skills to follow through on their goals.

Settlement services are the foundation for a successful transition to Canadian life, he said, meaning the federal dollars are a critical investment.

"Helping families face change can change everything," Ladak said.