

# Steeles/L'Amoreaux Local Immigration Partnership

## Partnership Council Planning Meeting Minutes

### Reflecting on the Interview Process and Planning for the Community Summit

**Date:** March 30, 2010, 9am-1pm

**Location:** Toronto Public Library – Agincourt  
155, Bonis Ave., Scarborough

#### Welcome and Update on Process

Introduction of Attendees:

Hanna Cabaj (TCDSB), Cathy Smyth (City of Toronto), Mani Mahadeva (S/L'Am LIP), Hanifa Kassam (ACSA), Michele Allen (Access Employment), Christe Okonkwo- MacKenzie (City of Toronto), Thilaga Jeganathan (CCVT), Rabindra Sabat (SAFSS), Jorge Silvestri (MNLCT), Ralph Gain (Youth Link), Mei Tin Lee (CICS), Connie Leung (CICS), Augustine Jeeram (S/L'Am LIP), Karen Evans (TDSB), Malsan Gananendran (ANC Glendower), Cyletha Gibson (S/L'Am LIP), Lucy Ren (S/L'Am LIP), Rezwanul Karim (S/L'Am LIP), Sulekha Sathi (Toronto Public Library), Cynthia du Mont (WSNCC), Gurprit Matharu (SSSC), Adair Heath (City of Toronto), Anadalee Adamali (TCHC)

#### 1. Purpose of the day

- Hear Stories told by stakeholders
- Uncover common themes about;
- what is working best for newcomers today
- what wishes people have for a better newcomer experience
- Identify topics we want to explore more deeply at the summit with community leaders and other stakeholders

#### 2. Sharing Stories from Interviews

Break down of Interviewees – (refer to slides #8 - "Who the LIP Team Interviewed)

LIP members share their most notable story:

Members introduce themselves and agency they work for, the type of interviewee they conducted and points of significance:

Jorge Silvestri (MNLCT) – Business owner

Malsan Gananendran (ANC Glendower) - Toronto Housing

Karen Evans (TDSB) – Newcomer

Mei Tin Lee (CICS) – Chinese Business Assoc. member

Michelle Allen (Acess Employment) – Employment Services Provider

### **3. Sharing Stories in Groups**

Small discussions in tables where each member shared either their own personal experiences as a newcomer or stories that they recalled from the interviews with stakeholders:

#### **Story #1**

A young woman comes to Canada on her father's sponsorship, finds her living situation very difficult since she does not get along with her father's new wife, and is forced to move out. She was able to find an agency to help her get social assistance, Chinese family services, and shelter. Community resource connections services helped – she had support when she came but then lost family support – linked her to different agencies through the library – collaboration, connection, communication, rapport-building

#### **Story #2**

A participant retells his own personal story of coming to Canada with professional status, and 16 years experience in humanitarian and hospitality. Agencies offered great support and guidance, working on job search, providing volunteer opportunities, providing job search tools. Initially lacked support from own cultural group leaders and community who refused to provide job references. Proved abilities to Canadian agency and was able to gain job references. Community support was very difficult in the beginning but persevered.

#### **Story #3**

A woman living in Canada for 18 years, came with little education, two children, working in sewing factory, was being abused by her employer. She felt she had no voice or anywhere to turn. With limited English skills she was only able to find support from family, but when she gained the courage to go to the police it was too late. She could not afford a lawyer and is currently on EI, but has gone back to school to improve her English.

#### **Story #4**

An immigrant living in Canada with a background in social science was looking for a job in the social services sector. He started by volunteering, did a JSW workshop but still could not find job. Agencies were unable to find him a mentor, and he became very frustrated settling for a job working in fast food. Found an organization that was very welcoming and their settlement

worker was great. Within 2 weeks found a relevant job posting and was hired. Recommended not giving up and to be persistent.

(For all stories shared please see slides #12-14)

#### **4. What stood out in the Stories (Themes):**

- Struggle and disappointment

Initial contact and relationships are very critical between provider and client – if there is a good link, we build a good sense of what Canada is about – clarity

- Our systems – Service providers make so many assumptions

Assume that people are happy to settle for jobs at home depot etc. – minimizing their value – see them as whole person not just another client

We judge – our services are impacted by our judgments – may not see the whole / capable person – prejudices may get in the way – need to look within – are we seeking to understand from their perspective – need to look deeper

- Services Available – Accessibility and Quality?

Services are there by some are better than others – are we providing quality service? Is this the best way?

Are our services accessible to all the newcomers? – language barrier/ cost involvement

- Programs to promote designation

Best services – listen, ensure people are treated with respect and with potential – be sensitive to each other

Not treating client as passive recipient but as a person who needs to be empowered to move forward – story: came to Canada – did research in advance – was ahead... not starting from scratch – in transition for years before getting here – how can we support people through that period

- Importance of building cross cultural competence – style switching

Links to services (legal, housing, counseling, language empathy, moral support, human rights, financial management)

How can we work together to do advocacy work (immigration policies etc.) – what can we do together to create a stronger country, challenge the government etc. (OCASI)

Need for support within communities – helping those established to help others – mentoring – a way to bridge

## 5. Review of Themes

- What is working best in the settlement process today?
  - Access to language classes
  - Multi-services locations
  - Welcoming, informal
  - Employment programs – placements, job readiness skills
  - Credential assessment
  - Childcare programs

### Surprises:

- Housing was not a common theme
- What were the people we interviewed wishing for to enhance the experience of newcomers?
  - Importance of community involvement
  - Integration of services
  - Education – accessibility
  - Affordable housing
  - Whole immigration process- speed up process
  - Access information- awareness
  - Assessing credentials
  - Settlement like a curriculum
  - Collaboration of agencies
  - Mobility of Services
  - Connect w/ real employer
  - Involve newcomers in the process (engagement)
  - Fewer referrals – services all in one place
  - Employment – better connections with business (Employment Ontario – lots of changes coming – more integration coming this summer)
  - Institutions and government – be creative – outside the box ideas for services

### Surprises:

- Improving Credential assessment
- Health Services not mentioned

## 6. Identifying Topics to Explore at the Summit with the Broader Community

- How do we find a way to integrate service provision even more to generate the one-stop-shop experience?
- How do we support the community to support community?
- How do we engage newcomers in designing services more? (with newcomers vs. to newcomers)
- How do we provide right info, right time, right place (curriculum of settlement) in holistic way?

- How do we know that we're providing the best services? (Are we measuring and how?)
- How do we raise the bar of all of our services to the level of best? /How do we locate the quality best practices in each of our services?

**7. April 6<sup>th</sup> Community Summit Agenda:**

- Welcome and Overview of the Project
- Sharing the Stories We Have Heard and Themes
- Sharing the Question We are Inquiring Into
- Inquiry: Answering Key Questions
- Visioning: Imagining a Better Future for Newcomers
- Identification of Focus Areas
- The Path Forward

**8. Review of the Summit and the Path Forward – What to Expect and the Role We Need You to Play**

Key themes will be:

- PARTICIPATE FULLY
- SHARE THE STORIES