North West Scarborough
LOCAL IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP

# Service Standards Guideline: A Tool for Service Organizations in Creating an Effective & Welcoming Space

March 2012

Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada

# Table of Contents

# Background

**The North West Scarborough Local Immigration Partnership was established in December 2009. Led by Agincourt Community Services Association, the Partnership aims to develop and implement sustainable local and regional solutions for successful integration of immigrants in northwest Scarborough. The Partnership Council facilitates collaboration and partnership among north west Scarborough service providers and networks with local, municipal, provincial and federal stakeholders. The main objectives of the Partnership are to:**

- **Enhance access to current and relevant information about newcomer services**
- **Enable communities to play a valuable role to assist new immigrant**
- **Ensure effective service delivery through coordination and partnership among service providers**

**In 2010, the NWS LIP developed and implemented an in-depth community consultation process which included one-on-one interviews, focus groups discussion and community summits to identify priority needs and challenges faced by immigrant population in the catchment area. The community consultation results confirmed the need to enhance access to current and relevant information about settlement services in the neighbourhood. NWS LIP established a working committee to address this focus area in 2010. This committee undertakes different activities such as improving outreach methods; enhance communication & information dissemination among different stakeholders and improving access to newcomer information.**

# The Basis of this Guideline

**Why was this guideline developed?**
Access to relevant and current information is the key for immigrants to start their life in Canada. In addition, the feeling of being welcomed at an organization's premises is another factor that influences immigrants experience within an organization. This premise allows immigrants to feel comfortable and accept the service from the organization. Further, it will help to establish trust and stronger worker – client relationships. Each organization uses its own guidelines aligned with the organizational operational manual. However, NWS LIP has found that there exist differences in service delivery. This guideline attempts to create a common platform that could set a service delivery benchmark for all the service providers. This guideline will also help frontline staff to offer a friendly environment for new immigrants.
Though all the LIP member organizations are categorized as service provider organizations, there are differences in their policies and procedures. The LIP suggests that each organization can adopt this guide, making the necessary changes to correspond with the organization's own policies and service mandate.

**How was the guideline developed?**
The NWS LIP has identified the need for a common guide that helps service organizations to ensure uniform service delivery to the newcomer clients and service excellence. As part of the process, the LIP collected centre guidelines and related documents that are currently in use from a number of member organizations. The LIP also incorporated research findings from community consultations with member organization staff and clients. A draft guideline was then developed and reviewed by the Access to Information Working Committee. Based on the feedback from the Committee members and the Management Committee, the document was revised and finalized.

**What is in this guideline?**
This guideline mainly describes how frontline staff should receive a client, offer services and provide additional assistance.
This guideline provides information and tips on the following:

- Welcoming and the equitable treatment of a client
- Needs assessment/ getting to know your client
- Delivering quality services
- Case management/ follow up
- Collecting feedback (clients satisfaction and service improvement)
- Creating positive spaces (enhance accessibility)

The guideline also talks about the rights and responsibilities of a client which will help both staff and clients define expectations and the boundaries.

**How to use this guideline?**
The objective of this tool is to provide basic guidance to staff who deal with clients on a daily basis or as a tool for supervisors and managers. This guide can also be used as an HR tool with appropriate changes to orient new staff and as refresher for other staff members.

Though the NWS LIP Council does not expect each member organization to adopt this guideline as it is, the Council encourages frontline staff and middle level managers of member organizations to comply with it as much as possible.

**Why an organization needs to establish and maintain service standards?**
"Service standards outline the specific delivery targets established by an organization, and are made up of a set of commitments that an organization promises to honour when delivering a service. They also describe what a client or user can expect to receive from the service, and the manner in which the service will be delivered. Service standards are vital because they hold organizations accountable for the level of service they provide. They maintain a level of consistency that allows both client and provider to know where they stand and what outcomes they should expect. Service standards alleviate ambiguity from the process and provide clients with a set of commitments that can be referred to when evaluating an organization's performance. Organizations that meet or exceed these standards will in turn see a rise in client satisfaction, public perception and overall organizational performance". (Institute for Citizen-centred Service: http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/)

Service standards are widely discussed and seriously considered in the corporate sector; likewise it is equally important for non-profit service providers to maintain their quality of service delivery and consistency. Overall, this guideline provides tips that will help to create an environment for service providers to enhance the quality of services and establish better client- staff relationships. It is also important that organizations continuously refine and revise their service standards based on the inputs from clients, staff members and other key stakeholders.

# Guiding Principles

**These guiding principles reflect an organization's collective views on the way it conducts business and achieves its goals. These principles help to create an organizational culture where everyone understands what's important. Each employee needs a clear and complete understanding of their organization's priorities and how to communicate internally and with the public. Staff members are expected to provide service according to the following guidelines to maintain a common standard:**

- **Inclusiveness and diversity - treat everyone with respect and dignity irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship status, age, sexual orientation and physical or mental ability.**
- **Be committed to provide service with cultural sensitivity and maintain a high standard of professionalism.**
- **Respect the privacy of clients and maintain the confidentiality of personal information.**
- **Provide services that are appropriate to clients with diverse backgrounds and residency status.**
- **Be up-to-date with current information and competent in the provision of programs and services.**
- **Be aware of services / resources availability within the organizations catchment areas and surrounding areas, in order to be able to make effective and appropriate referrals.**
- **Have a clear understanding of customer rights and responsibilities to educate clients.**
- **Be prepared and well equipped to help people with disabilities and other challenges.**
- **Continuously collect and analyze feedback from clients to ensure service standards and client satisfaction.**

# Welcoming Clients

**The front desk / receptionist is generally the first point of contact for anyone entering or calling an organization. The role of the receptionist varies from one organization to another, but it is important to give each visitor their prompt and undivided attention. Creating a friendly environment and greeting clients in a courteous manner will make clients feel welcomed, and positively reflects on an organization. Front desk staff are expected to adhere to the following:**

- **Make sure the environment of the office makes clients feel comfortable.**
- **Avoid signage that starts with "No..." in the reception area. This can give negative connotations.**
- **Acknowledge and greet all clients in a friendly manner; state your name and title (if it is the first meeting).**
- **Staff/volunteer identification cards are to be worn at all times when serving clients.**
- **Give each client your full attention. Maintain eye contact with clients to ensure their sense of importance.**
- **If you get more than one client at a time, ask the others to take a seat until you finish with the first client.**
- **Explain and apologize for any interruption or delays. Inform clearly how long it might take to be served.**
- **Once the client is ready to communicate, ask the client whether this is the first visit or subsequent visit.**
- **Ask the client whether they need any interpretation support or prefer to meet any specific staff member.**
- **Make sure the reception area is neutral and an appropriate place to continue the discussion. If not, take the client to another room or common space where they feel comfortable.**
- **During a clients first visit and after asking the purpose of their visit, provide information about other related services and facilities you offer.**
- **Provide related materials such as brochures and handbooks for the client to refer and get more information.**
- **Refrain from making any loud, offensive noises or distractions that can negatively affect a customers' impression.**
- **Don't judge the ability of a client, instead ask the client directly how best they can be assisted.**
- **Do not offer opinions, information or expressions that reflect negatively on your organization or other service providers.**
- **Maintain a professional relationship throughout the process.**

# Needs Assessment

**Identifying a clients' needs (needs assessment) is a very crucial step in serving clients effectively. This involves listening to the clients, asking questions and encouraging clients to ask questions to form a clear understanding around their issues and needs. Staff also need to collect relevant information to establish individual objectives and develop a work plan for each client. Clients should be involved in this process and should be informed about next steps.**

**Process:**

- **Make clients comfortable - before starting the needs assessment, explain to the client the overall process and how it will help you to better serve the person.**
- **Before starting the needs assessment, ensure clients' eligibility for a particular service.**
- **Before ending the interview with a client, ensure that a copy of proof of residency status and other documents of the client have been photocopied and filed as required.**
- **Tell the client what information you will record, the purpose of collecting the information, and what you will do with the information.**
- **All the information collected from a client should be recorded in a database or file and kept secure and confidential. Make sure only authorized person/s have access to the information.**
- **Staff should start an interview/needs assessment process while being aware of the client's state of mind and emotional state.**
- **During the needs assessment process, clarify questions so clients can explain their needs clearly.**
- **Make sure to fully understand what a client is saying. Summarize key points to confirm understanding.**
- **Encourage clients to ask questions they have.**
- **The needs assessment process should be short. Avoid answering phone calls or talking to other staff members when you are engaged with a client doing an assessment.**
- **During the needs assessment interview you may hear of things that need immediate attention. If it's something in your control, do it right away. If not, do what you can to ensure it gets done. Prompt action will help clients feel their opinions are valued.**
- **During the interview process, the staff has to assess the client's needs and also identify his/her strengths and ability.**

# Providing Services

**Good service delivery is all about client satisfaction and making them feel comfortable with returning for future services. Staff who serve clients should carefully review their clients' needs and start with those that are immediate and simple and make sure it is what they want.**

- **Based on the need/s of the client, you can serve him or her if it is in your control. If not, lead the client to an appropriate staff member.**
- **If you need to record the outcome of the discussion between the client and the other staff member, ask the client to report back to you before leaving the office.**
- **Any staff member who directly communicates with a client should abide by this guideline. He/ she should focus on addressing the immediate needs of the clients and set a time line with the client if there are multiple needs and when the client can visit again.**
- **If you have different service options for clients, please explain them and let the client choose.**
- **If the client asks for advice, share your expertise by offering suggestions.**
- **Clearly explain to the clients the limitations in providing services such as eligibility criteria that are set by funders.**
- **If any of the client's needs could be served by another organization at your location, inform the client and give details.**
- **If payment is involved with any of the services or facilities at your office, clearly inform the client.**
- **After providing services to clients, record client information including the service provided or direct them to the reception if the data entry is to be done at the front desk.**
- **Always thank service users.**

# Client Feedback

Client feedback would help to identify the level of client's satisfaction, changes in client's needs and opportunities for new services. The results will help to make necessary adjustments to improve services to better meet the client's needs and thus ensure client satisfaction.

- When you serve a client, at end of the process, ask him/her to provide feedback. You can use an evaluation form for this purpose.
- If the client has difficulties in filling out the form, assist the client to record the feedback.
- Clients should be encouraged to provide their feedback either using an evaluation form or talking to one of the staff. Clients reserve the rights to keep their information anonymous.
- All the suggestions and complaints should be taken seriously and responded to by relevant officer within a reasonable time.
- You may have a suggestion box at the main reception area where clients can drop off their feedback.

# Referrals

Referrals are an important part of client service and are the responsibility of every organization. If information and/or services cannot be provided as expected by a client, it is the organizations responsibility to refer them to another organization. When referring clients to another service provider, follow the steps given below:

- Complete a referral form (if required) and give it to the client, including the necessary details about the other organization.
- Ask the client if they would like you to call the other organization on their behalf for information or to book an appointment to visit. Or the client can talk directly to the organization themselves.
- Always consider a client's preferences (language, cultural background, distance, service hours, etc.) when recommending another service provider.
- Staff can choose to accompany a client to the other service provider only if they would benefit from being guided through the process.
- Build a rapport with staff from other service providers in your neighbourhood in order to make effective referrals.
- Keep records of referral made to help make client follow up more effective.

# Client Follow~Up

- **Staff should follow up with clients who either got referrals or received direct services.**
- **Staff should monitor progress made by individual clients by doing regular follow up via phone or e-mail. If the client visits your organization again for the same service or another, you can do the follow up in person.**
- **Any follow up must be documented (added to the file or database) to keep track of a clients' status.**
- **Feedback from a client must also be sought as part of the follow up procedure in order to determine a service users' satisfaction.**

**Important:** Proper client follow up is key to effective case management practices.

"Case Management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's holistic needs through communication and available resources to promote quality cost effective outcomes." (Case Management Society of Australia, January 15, 2012)

# Process

- When initial contact with client is made, the staff will determine whether it is an inquiry or a service need. If it is an inquiry, staff provides information and referrals.
- If it is a service need, staff makes an assessment to determine whether the client can be served or if they need to be referred to another service provider.
- If the client needs to be referred to another service provider, make the referral and close the file.
- If the client can be served by the organization, staff will review the case and recommended solutions. If the client's need is fulfilled, the file will be closed.
- If the client's need is not fulfilled during the first visit, the case will be maintained for a period of time until the need is fulfilled. Case plans, recommendations, requests, and actions taken will be recorded in the file. Client's progress will be monitored, their current situation will be recorded and their case will be followed up periodically.

# Documentation

- Staff has to dedicate a time slot each week for documentation of all handled cases.
- All the staff who directly deal with clients must ensure that a follow up mechanism is in place to support client's expectations. A file can be opened or electronic database can be used.
- Each client should get a client reference number which the client should be informed of.
- A client file must have the following forms: Client Intake form, Action Plan, Client Follow up form, copy of clients identity documents (Ex: PR card or Driver's license), and other relevant documents related to the case.
- Supervisors need to check clients' files periodically to verify that proper follow up is in place.
- All client files are to be stored in a secured place accessible to authorized personnel only.

Positive Space refers to a welcoming environment, as well as equitable treatment and accessibility of persons or people with disabilities, all sexual orientation and gender diversity. Thus, clients are able to access inclusive services with dignity and respect.

# Creating Positive Space for Clients

As a matter of public policy, Ontario recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of every person and provides for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination. This policy has been designed to create a climate of understanding and mutual respect so that each person feels a part of the community and able to contribute to its development. (Peel District School Board, Feb. 02, 2012)

Service providers receive clients from diverse cultural backgrounds who have different abilities and different service needs including clients from the LGBTQ community or people who have physical / mental disabilities. They have the right to a welcoming space in an office environment. They should also be made to feel comfortable and able to receive equal services. In order to make office environments welcoming and accessible to people with disabilities and the LGBTQ community, staff members should ensure the following:

- All staff members should have a clear understanding of the ability, expectations and challenges of people with disabilities, the LQBTQ community and other marginalized groups.
- Staff should be non-judgmental and treat each individual equally regardless of disability or sexual orientation.
- Staff should keep in mind that clients that identify themselves with the LGBTQ community or people with disabilities have the right to experience helpful customer service
- Staff should be friendly and offer a safe space so that clients can express their individual service needs with confidence.
- Staff will respect the personal space of the client. Offer assistance for mobility or a facility only if the client asks. Service users with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Clearly visible and legible signage should be placed in the office premises that gives a welcoming gesture to people with special needs ( Ex: such as wheelchair accessibility signs for people with disabilities, a red ribbon for HIV/AIDS, or a rainbow flag for the LGBTQ community)

- A centre should be equipped for accessibility, such as automated doors, a wheel chair ramp and/or elevators, reserved parking spots, space for assisting devices and service animals, etc.
- Staff should inform the client about the accessible features on premises.
- Information and promotional materials should be made available according to the ability of the client. Ex: materials prepared in Braille or large print for people with vision impairment.

Clients have equal responsibility when it comes to service provision. Upon entering an organization, potential clients have certain rules and guidelines they are to follow , not only to maintain order, but to ensure their service experience is most effective.

# General Guidelines for Clients

**While staff should be knowledgeable/resourceful and equipped to provide the best services, clients also need to be aware and comply with the following guidelines. Understanding their rights and responsibilities will help clients to use services and facilities for their individual needs and respect values and principles of the organization.**

**Every organization develops guidelines for clients based on the services and facilities they offer. The following are some guidelines for using office space and resources:**

- **Clients are expected to follow the office etiquette while visiting an office and receiving services.**
- **When talking to staff, be clear and concise regarding your service needs. Ask for interpretation assistance if needed.**
- **If you have an appointment, always try to arrive a few minutes early.**
- **Please wait for your turn and respect others' space.**
- **Some office premises are perfume free or have other restrictions. Please comply with those instructions.**
- **Client may need special support or assisting devices and should ask for help. Clients can also use their own assistive devices.**
- **Clients are expected to act in a courteous manner with staff and other clients in the premises.**

# Rules for Using Office Resources

1. **When using an organizations computers, printer, photocopier , or any other equipment or facilities , they should only be used for the purposes that are defined by the organization. (Ex: Employment, immigration or educational purposes, permitted recreational activities, etc.)**
2. **If booking is required for computer or other office equipment use, clients need to talk to a designated staff member to make necessary arrangements. It is the responsibility of each client to ask staff in charge to put their name on computer or office equipment waiting lists.**
3. **The client must discuss with designated staff members if they wish to use their own personal electronic devices. (Ex: laptop, cell phone, mp3 player, etc.)**
4. **Follow all organizations instructions for making phone calls, using fax machines, printers, photocopiers, etc. While using equipment, clients should limit use to a reasonable time frame that is considerate of others. (Ex: Phone calls should be a maximum of hr., pending on demand, and clients should keep their voice down)**
5. **Clients who are not familiar with the use of a printer/ fax/ photocopy machine must ask staff in charge for assistance. Always ask for help from staff members for trouble shooting assistance.**
6. **Some centres provide resource materials and books to be used in resource areas only. Clients should not take any books or resource materials anywhere else.**
7. **Generally food and drink are prohibited in some designated areas. Clients need to abide by those instructions.**

# References

1. Newcomer Centre Guideline, ACSA
2. Newcomer Information Centre Guide, YMCA
3. Immigrant Welcome Centre Guide, CICS
4. Ontario Education Service Corporation – Tips on Serving Customers with Disabilities. http://www.alcdsb.on.ca/aboutus/pdf/accessibility/AccessibilityTipBooklet.pdf, Jan. 20, 2012
5. Peel District School Board - http://www.gobeyondwords.org/The_Future_We_Want.html, Feb. 02, 2012
6. http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/mcss/serve-ability/splash.html, Dec. 20, 2011
7. http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/, Jan. 11, 2012
8. http://www.cmsa.org.au/definition.html, Jan. 15, 2012