INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT

Settlement services and welcoming communities are both needed in the pursuit of successful economic and social integration for newcomers. Though orientation and basic language training are a good start, important barriers to full participation remain.

ROSALINE FRITH

Rosaline Frith is Director General, Integration Branch, at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

Canada is a country that has been built by immigrants. And, in order for immigration to continue to be an investment for this country, we need to ensure that newcomers have the opportunity to reach their social and economic potential in Canada. This includes opportunities for newcomers to work at their level of ability and to participate in our social, economic, educational and political institutions. Settlement services comprise one component of Canada's integration policies and programs that help newcomers to become fully participating members of the Canadian family. Those services are effective only when combined with welcoming communities.

Integration is a two-way process of accommodation between newcomers and Canadians: encouraging immigrants to adapt to Canadian society without requiring them to abandon their cultures; while encouraging Canadians and Canadian institutions to respect and reflect the cultural differences newcomers bring to the country. Integration is a visible expression of our shared citizenship values: accommodation of differences, promotion of cultural diversity, building of communities based on mutual respect and bringing the world inside our borders. The creation of inclusive institutions and political processes, and the participation of newcomers in those processes, is essential to their integration in Canada.

For some immigrants and refugees, the integration continuum begins overseas and continues through the process of acquiring citizenship. Canada's immigration and citizenship programs provide support for settlement services and offer newcomers the opportunity to obtain Canadian citizenship following a three-year residency period. Integration policies, programs and services are managed and delivered through multi-jurisdictional partnerships with other federal departments, provincial and territorial governments, private business, and the voluntary and not-for-profit sectors. In 2001-02, the federal government allocated approximately $333M to settlement programming for newcomers.

Throughout the continuum, settlement programs assist newcomers with orientation, reception, adaptation services, language training for adults, bridging programs to assist with labour market entry, mentoring programs and more. For example, the Canadian Orientation Abroad program provides approximately 9,000 prospective immigrants per year with a realistic view of life in Canada before arrival. Orientation sessions include information on topics such as education, climate, housing, cost of living, and employment. Reception services in Canada include the distribution of a "Welcome to Canada" kit at major ports of entry and for government assisted refugees assistance with temporary accommodation, additional community-focussed orientation, income support and referral to other settlement services.

Research has shown that proficiency in one of Canada's official languages is critical to effective integration. Canada's current *Citizenship Act* requires that applicants have an adequate knowledge of English or French. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is one of Canada's official newcomer language training programs. It is worthy of note that 2002 was the 10th anniversary of LINC. Over its 10 years, LINC has served some 460,000 newcomers, that is, approximately 46,000 per year. The LINC program currently provides basic language training to adult immigrants. Classes are delivered part or full time, days, evenings or weekends; transportation allowances are provided; and childminding is available in order to encourage the participation of women.

Basic language training helps newcomers face the challenges of becoming involved in their communities, in participating in their children's schooling, in feeling that Canada is truly their home. A sense of belonging is a crucial factor to integration and to the ultimate goal of integration – full, constructive participation symbolized by the uptake of Canadian citizenship. Newcomers must have the capacity, the willingness and the opportunity to express their needs, interests and problems. They must be able to contribute to public debates about pressing issues such as poverty, the environment, globalisation, etc. There should be a real probability that their contribution will help to shape the outcome of the debate. On their part, Canadian citizens must also be able to accept the outcome of that debate. Integration is a two way process of learning and growing together. It takes more than language proficiency to develop that mutual bond.

A sense of belonging is a crucial factor to integration and to the ultimate goal of integration – full, constructive participation symbolized by the uptake of Canadian citizenship.

A real sense of belonging is created when newcomers can fulfill their potential – get and keep a job, transfer and apply previously acquired occupational skills and participate fully in Canadian institutions and community life. Welcoming communities fosters that sense of belonging. The Host Program is one way in which Canadian citizens are actually engaged in the integration process. Volunteers are matched with newcomers to help ease the emotional burden of moving to a new country, to introduce newcomers to their community and to help them practice English and French. This is the two-way street of integration – it demands that both immigrants and the host society make an effort, both are mutually involved.

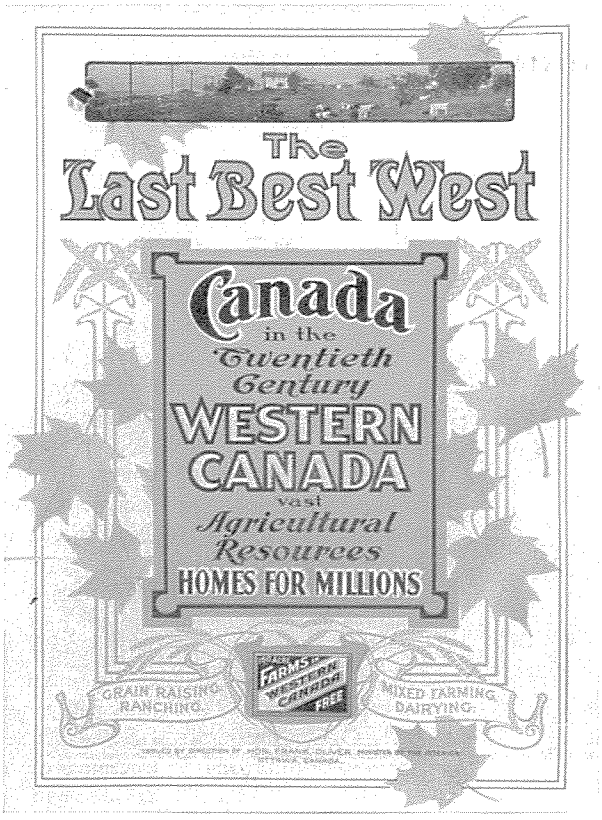
The Canadian school system also plays a significant role in teaching and modeling active citizenship, both for our children, and for the parents of those children. Schools provide a natural microcosm of our multicultural society where we can teach inclusiveness, acceptance of differences, public spiritedness and the conduct of public discussion in a respectful manner. The "Canada We All Belong" campaign, first targeted to schools in 2000, addresses discrimination by celebrating diversity and cultivating a sense among adults and children that newcomers not only belong to Canada, but that Canada belongs to them.

Successful economic and social integration is essential for enabling newcomers to achieve their full potential and become citizens with a stake in Canada's future. Orientation and basic language training is not sufficient for successful integration. Immigrants and refugees still face difficulty entering the labour market. The absence of effective credential assessment and recognition processes, as well as insufficient supports for work-related language training, contributes to the gap between immigrant earnings and employment rates and those of Canadian-born workers. These challenges and the proposed goals for addressing them are outlined in Canada's Innovation Strategy's policy paper, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians, which was released in February 2002.*

Integration policy strives for a society that is structurally free of barriers to participation. All must feel included. Barriers such as poverty, illiteracy, homelessness and inaccessibility must be removed. That is why research is vital to immigration policy and program development. If the level of participation is a measure of integration, then we need to know what factors either exclude or include immigrants in the work force, in social and political institutions and in everyday community activities. Such information helps to better design our integration programming.

All levels of government and civil society are collaborating to effect change in many ways. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has created an ongoing policy dialogue on the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees with various stakeholders including service providing organizations and provincial governments. Through this dialogue, the current gaps in integration services can be identified and creative solutions forged.

Working together, we will continue efforts to build the kind of nation that enables all people to achieve their potential.



National Archives of Canada (C30621)