



ST. THOMAS • ELGIN
Local Immigration Partnership
Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

MOVING FORWARD

2013



Our Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County communities will be a culturally diverse, welcoming, caring and inclusive community that will retain current residents, welcome newcomers and provide them the opportunity to successfully integrate, contribute to, and benefit from social, cultural and economic inclusion.

Our Principles

To ensure that the work of those associated with the initiative promotes inclusivity, the following principles have been adopted:

Inclusivity – The work of the Council, members of working committees and volunteers will be inclusive of all immigrants in the St. Thomas-Elgin community regardless of their immigration status, citizenship, age, gender, health status, sexual orientation, and number of years in the community. The Council shall work towards equal participation while promoting social justice.

Collaboration – A working relationship will be developed between the host community and the immigrant community to build a welcoming and caring environment.

Empowerment – Our work will strive to promote new immigrant's capacity to live their lives with the ability to be economically stable, live in adequate housing, and provide for themselves and their family through their own means and their own decisions

Sustainability – A plan shall be developed to ensure that the work of the ST-ELIP Council will continue to make improvements to immigrant's experiences and the community as a whole.

ST-ELIP COUNCIL 2012

Chair:

Shelley Harris YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Members:

Abe Harms Mennonite Community Services
Adriana Balderas Community Member
Alicia Malcolm Employment Services Elgin
Bob Hammersley St. Thomas and Area Chamber of Commerce
Debra Mountenay Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
Heather Moller Central Community Health Centre
Jeff Kohler City of St. Thomas Alderman
John Robinson Community Member
Kate Burns Elgin County Economic Development
Mike Amato Fanshawe College
Sam Yusuf City of St. Thomas Alderman
Sean Dyke St. Thomas Economic Development
Vicki Luke Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

ST-ELIP PROJECT TEAM

Petrusia Hontar Researcher/Project Assistant
Alfredo Marroquin Project Coordinator

Project Consultants and Funding

Project Team:

Shelley Harris – Manager of Education and Employment, YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Alfredo Marroquin – Project Coordinator

Petrusia Hontar – Researcher/Project Assistant

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Immigration Canada

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Partners:

Central Community Health Centre

Elgin County Economic Development

Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board

Employment Services Elgin

Fanshawe College

Mennonite Community Services

Mennonite Savings and Credit Union

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce

St. Thomas Economic Development

The City of St. Thomas

The County of Elgin

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

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Acknowledgements

Appreciation is deeply expressed to the various organizations and agencies across St. Thomas and Elgin County and especially to the various sectors that have given members of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership Council the time to participate in the work of the ST-ELIP this year.

We are very fortunate to have ST-ELIP Council members who are skilled and knowledgeable community leaders and also have a great deal of experience working with organizations, community and connections to resources.

Their leadership has greatly contributed to building a shared ownership that resulted in their agency to take the lead on the implementation of some of the priorities identified in the 2012-2015 Settlement Strategy.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has made this project possible, both through committed leadership and generous funding, which are gratefully acknowledged.

Having the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin and the Mennonite Community Services, well-respected organizations with a significant number of years of commitment to community service, as our partners in delivering direct services to assist newcomers has been a privilege indeed.

Many individuals with a genuine interest and a real passion for the initiative have contributed in different ways and the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is deeply grateful of each of their contributions.

We want to celebrate the achievements of this project and acknowledge that without everyone's contributions we would not be on the path we are presently on.

We are extremely excited to introduce to the community, The St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee, the first of its kind in our region, who bring enthusiasm, commitment and passion. The current members of the Cultural Diversity Committee are, (in alphabetical order):

Alfredo Marroquin
Christian Daboud
Christine Belan
Debra Mountenay
Dharmishtha Patel
Donovan Ladner
Iffat Farooqui
Kathleen Chalmers

Meagen Pyper
Petrusia Hontar
Sam Yusuf
Shelley Harris
Stephanie Greatrix
Susan Fortin-Smith
Todd Goold

Message from ST-ELIP Chair

Dear St. Thomas and Elgin County community members,

The St. Thomas–Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (ST-ELIP) has accomplished many of our goals since we began our project in February of 2011.

We have established a multi-sectoral council of agencies and individuals to work toward the successful integration of newcomers into our community. We have gathered committed agencies and service providers to network and grow in their understanding of the challenges and needs of those settling. The Council has also continued to develop and review our strategies to improve the capacity of our community to welcome and integrate newcomers.

We want to thank the Council for their vision and input this year to guide this strategy; they have taken time from their personal and professional obligations to support the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership.

We are excited to present the next stage of our project including our accomplishments as well as our revised strategies. Within each item you will see the commitment to continue to develop St. Thomas and Elgin into a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community for all.

We trust that you all find this next year of the Settlement Strategy truly represents the contributions of newcomers, our Council, partner agencies, levels of governments, and those interested in the future growth of St. Thomas and Elgin county.



Shelley Harris, Chair ST-ELIP

ST-ELIP Highlights of 2011-2012

The ST-ELIP was established on February 28, 2011. Since then, a great deal of work towards the implementation of the Settlement Strategy priorities has taken place in St. Thomas and Elgin.

This region and the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership are extremely lucky to have committed ST-ELIP Council Members, skilled and knowledgeable community leaders with a great deal of experience with organizations, community and connections to resources. We strongly believe that the establishment of the ST-ELIP Council in our region is a major achievement!

Having a very dynamic, passionate and effective team is important for sustainability. The ST-ELIP team is made up of representatives of very relevant sectors, a committed staff who together with the community, has been lovingly working to build a shared understanding and a collective ownership of the initiative as well as celebrating achievements and acknowledging everyone's contributions.

The leadership of this dynamic team, which has provided a clear vision, guiding principles, and a tangible work plan, continues to be key to maintaining the momentum gained in the creation stage of this initiative and it will continue to do so as we move forward with the implementation of various priority areas identified as strategies to be implemented in the 2011-2012 period.

The work involved in implementing priorities is being led by agencies represented in ST-ELIP Council in collaboration with ST-ELIP team, for most of the actions that have been pursued had no established working group.

We are very proud to present the highlights of the 2012-2013 Implementation year. The following report presents the intention of the priority followed with the highlights that have been achieved.

Did you know?

The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI), Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the City of Toronto, developed the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) concept to facilitate local efforts to help integrate newcomers to their communities.

(Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is one of 35 LIPs across Ontario



Coordination of Services

The purpose of working on this priority area is to address the need that immigrant and service providers expressed during the consultation phase: to become more familiarized with the resources, services and programs that are available within the community.

Therefore it was necessary to create opportunities for local and regional service providers to learn about the specific needs of immigrants and network with each other in order to develop a referral system.

It was also clear that newcomers also needed more information about existing services and programs to assist them in their integration.

The following are highlights of the 2012-2013 implementation year for the Priority Coordination of Services.

Highlights of 2012-13:

- » **Walk With Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event**
- » **Service Provider Community Guide**
- » **Service Provider Guide for Newcomers**
- » **Moving Forward 2013: Building Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive Communities**

Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event attracted 83 participants from the professional, business and newcomer communities and representation from 36 service provider agencies, of which 24 set up information booths about the services and programs they offered. The event included Panel Discussions with representatives from

Settlement Services, Employment Services and Health Service Sector and a panel of Newcomers who shared their stories about their successes and challenges. By organizing *Walk with Me: A Networking Event*, the ST-ELIP provided a unique Networking Conference for Service Providers and Newcomers to promote collaboration among social agencies and enhance access to services by newcomers in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Since we facilitated the conditions for a numerous and diverse sectors to be in attendance, we also included in the program an opportunity to raise awareness about diversity issues. As part of the one-day networking event, the ST-ELIP team also presented Dr. Leeno Karumanchery, Founder and Executive Director of Diversity Solutions Inc., who spoke about “Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the Provision of Services”.

The Participating agencies include:

- » Canadian Mental Health Association
- » Canadian Red Cross
- » Caring Cupboard
- » Central Community Health Centre
- » Community Employment Services Oxford
- » Contact North, St. Thomas
- » Churches in St. Thomas and Elgin County
- » Ed Corrigan Law
- » Elgin and St. Thomas Housing Corporation
- » Elgin Business Women’s Network
- » Elgin County Library
- » Elgin St. Thomas Public Health
- » Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic
- » Employment Services Elgin



Coordination of Services

- » Fanshawe College
- » Focus Fairview
- » Government of Canada Constituency Office
- » Kiwanis Club. St. Thomas
- » Legal Aid Ontario - London District
- » Literacy Link South Central
- » Member of Provincial Parliament
- » Member of Federal Parliament
- » Mennonite Community Services
- » Michael Loebach, Barrister and Solicitor
- » Ontario Early Years Centre
- » Oxford and Elgin Child an Youth Centre
- » Radio De Brigj CHPD 105.9 FM
- » Refugee Committee
- » Salvation Army CFS
- » Second Stage Housing
- » St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital
- » St. Thomas Library
- » St. Thomas Police Service
- » St. Thomas-Elgin Ontario Works
- » Talbot Teen Centre
- » VON Middlesex-Elgin
- » YMCA
- » YWCA Settlement Services
- » YWCA St. Thomas Elgin

As a result of this networking event, service provider agencies have started making more referrals, as well as created more opportunities for information sharing, training, and tools development among the partners within the wider community. Representatives of agencies in attendance presented the idea of joining efforts to organize another training event emphasizing the topic of “Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the Provision of Services”. Participants’ feedback also suggested that the Walk with Me Networking Event should become an annual event.

From the agencies in attendance, a **Service Provider Guide** for Newcomers will soon be ready for distribution to the newcomer community for easy access to information about community resources. This Service Provider Community Guide will also be tailored to Service Provider organizations to develop the **Service Provider Community Directory** to be used for referral purposes by different agencies.

Moving Forward 2013: Building Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive Communities is an event to celebrate the achievements of the ST-ELIP and the network of newcomers in the community and collect feedback to prepare for the upcoming year of implementation



Employment and Labour Market Access



The ST-ELIP was established in 2011 as a follow up to the Elgin St. Thomas Labour Force Development 2010 Development Strategy which identified the attraction and retention of newcomers as one of its priorities to respond to the issue of workforce aging by ensuring the continuous availability of a skilled workforce.

A very important aspect of the integration process of newcomers is access to the labour market and the role of employers. It is true that we, as a community, need to look at enhancing support systems and services such as settlement services, but businesses will ultimately be the ones hiring newcomers. In order for these businesses to adapt there is a need for awareness of the oncoming structural changes, the benefits to diversity, and an increased involvement in addressing the issues faced by the newcomer community.

In recognizing that newcomers will have different reasons for choosing a Canadian community to live and work in, the ST-ELIP realizes that the communities that are most successful with attracting and retaining newcomers will be those that identify their strengths such as community resources, good schools, wide range of services, and job opportunities.

It was no surprise then that participants in the research phase in St. Thomas-Elgin concluded unanimously that employment is one of the most important characteristics of a welcoming community.

As initial steps, the ST-ELIP presented action steps in the 2012-2015 Settlement Strategy to provide Employment Agencies specific training to increase awareness about labour market

challenges faced by immigrants and newcomers. In addition, actions steps were included to provide immigrants and newcomers information and training about obtaining and retaining employment.

Highlights:

- » Promoting Labour Market Access
- » Employment Counsellor Newcomer Toolkit

ST-ELIP and Employment Services Elgin have developed a solid working relationship and are meeting on an ongoing basis to: develop cultural sensitivity training, increase networking between employers and newcomers and immigrants, as well as provide newcomers with orientation regarding workplace culture and workshops to assist newcomers in understanding how to access the labour market. In addition, Employment Services Elgin will be working on creating a newcomer toolkit for their Job Counsellors to use.

Did you Know?

Demographic trends reveal that many small communities in Ontario will soon be in positions of population decline due to low replacement levels, aging populations and out-migration of youth.

(Rural Community Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2011)



Settlement and Integration

Many of us who have moved at least once, either from a different city or province, know full well the efforts needed to become adjusted to a new environment. It is possible that we will never know how monumental efforts are made by newcomers to Canada when they go through a process of adapting to a new home community. Depending on each situation, this process can often be long, or painful, or both. However, they find it is indispensable to adapt to their new home and become an integral part of our society. From basic adjustments to life in a new country, they move through to the longer term process of integration. However, meaningful integration is a two-way street. Newcomers do most of the hard work of adapting themselves to their new country, but the host community has a positive responsibility to adapt itself to its new members and offer them services, support, and opportunities to contribute the resources newcomers bring with them.

St. Thomas and Elgin County currently has two main agencies that provide services specifically for newcomers: Mennonite Community Services and YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin. In order to help support newcomers and immigrants, many events and initiatives took place in which the ST-ELIP collaborated with Settlement Service agencies.

The Mennonite Community Services offers a variety of program services such as: newcomer settlement, employment, transportation, interpretation, family education, a Low German radio station, and a thrift shop.

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin offers services that range from Adult Education, transitional housing for women and youth, community

programming, and settlement services to support newcomers settling in the County. These settlement services include information and orientation, referrals, English language classes, individual settlement counselling, and group information sessions to help newcomers adjust to a new life in St. Thomas and Elgin.

Three strategies were selected for implementation in 2012-2013: Disseminate information to newcomers at one access point, orient newcomers and immigrants to the Canadian system, and increase access to settlement and integration information

Highlights:

- » **Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event**
- » **Newcomer Panel Discussion**
- » **Service Provider Guide for newcomers**
- » **Information Session for Low German Speaking Mennonite Community**
- » **Newcomer Information Package**
- » **Information Session for Fanshawe College International Students (St. Thomas Campus)**
- » **Pancake Community Breakfast for Newcomers**
- » **Ongoing participation in St. Thomas and Elgin Initiatives**

Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event attracted representation from 24 service providers who set up information booths about the services and programs they offer and 83 participants from the professional, business and newcomer communities.

From the Walk with Me event newcomers who attended made connections with representatives of organizations participating at the information displays and some scheduled

Settlement and Integration

appointments with the service providers whose services they previously did not understand or know about.

Newcomer Panel Discussions allowed three newcomers to share their stories about their successes and challenges in integrating into Canada. They were presented to an audience made up by professionals, social providers and the community at large.

Service Provider Guide for Newcomers will soon be ready for distribution to the newcomer community for easy access to information about valuable community resources.

Information Session for Low German Speaking Mennonite Community was held to inform participants of their rights and responsibilities. Representatives from the Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic, Employment Services Elgin, Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, Ed Corrigan Law Office, Mennonite Community Services and the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin, presented on topics of Housing, Employment, Finances, Immigration and Citizenship and English Language Classes. The ST-ELIP partnered with the Mennonite Community Services and Radio De Brigj CHPD 105.9 FM to present this Information Session in English and Low German language.

Newcomer Information Package The ST-ELIP has nearly completed a newcomer guide that provides specific information to life in Canada for their basic needs and where to access these services. This includes their rights in Canada, community services they can access and how to effectively access federal, provincial, and municipal services.

Information Session for Fanshawe College International Students (St. Thomas Campus) Information was given to International students of the services and amenities in St. Thomas (previously only information on London was provided).

Pancake Community Breakfast for Newcomers The ST-ELIP partnered with the YWCA Settlement Services to offer a community breakfast. The invitation was especially open to newcomers but businesses, politicians, professionals were also invited. The purpose was to promote opportunities for networking and community integration.

Ongoing participation in St. Thomas and Elgin Initiatives Delivered presentations and group discussions in ESL classes, participated at many different social, educational, fundraising and or cultural events organized by Elgin County, the City of St. Thomas, Chambers of Commerce, Violence Against Women Services, Elgin Ambassadors Club, Elgin, the Mennonite Community Services, and YWCA Settlement Services.

Did you know?

Citizenship and Immigration Canada plans to admit a total of 240,000 to 265,000 new permanent residents in 2013.

(Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, 2012)

Language, ESL, and Communication



In St. Thomas and Elgin speaking English will definitely help newcomers to adapt to life by making it easier to participate in community life, obtain employment, communicate with Canadian born neighbours and to speak to their children in the language used at their school. There are a variety of English classes offered in St. Thomas and Elgin County for a variety of skills, locations, and eligibility.

experience of being part of the ST-ELIP Council and the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee, the newcomer participants are able to enrich our work, adapt, settle and integrate into Canadian Society by gaining a sense of belonging and being given opportunities to build and develop networks with people who are rooted in Canadian culture.

Highlights:

- » Delivered presentations and group discussions in ESL classes
- » Building diverse leadership through communication opportunities

The ST-ELIP delivered presentations and group discussions in ESL classes to ensure all voices in the community were heard, ST-ELIP organized a series of consultations including presentations to ESL classes, inviting feedback through community radio (in English, Low German and Spanish) to develop content for information session.

The ST-ELIP team has diligently been working to ensure the inclusion of newcomers in leadership positions to build diverse leadership through communication opportunities. At the present time there are two newcomer women in places of leadership in the ST-ELIP initiative. The intent is to bring together the experiences of newcomers with those of Canadian culture with a specific emphasis on fostering civic engagement, practice English communication skills, and learn more about their professions and Canadian workplace cultures. Through the



Did you know?

Statistics Canada's forecast for 2000-2026 estimates that 54.2% of all immigrants to Canada will come to Ontario.

(Rural Community Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2011)



Public Awareness

The ST-ELIP team is excited to share with the rest of the community the growth this initiative has had from its inception. The more people know about the work of the ST-ELIP, the more people want to get involved. It has been proven that St. Thomas-Elgin residents are not indifferent to a noble cause. The immigrant experience is not an exception. As our region becomes more diverse, it is important to become aware of their challenges and identify the role we play as residents of this community in building sustainable welcoming, caring and inclusive communities.

We are aware that with the exception of Aboriginal peoples, Canada is a nation of immigrants, and in the spirit of sustainability, social justice and responsibility, we would like to honour and celebrate cultural diversity.

For us, celebrating diversity is not only sharing our cultural traditions, music and food, but most importantly looking at ways on how to ensure the inclusion of newcomers and immigrants in the areas of civic participation, access to services and access to the labour market.

Highlights:

- » **The establishment of the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee**
- » **Work with the Media to promote positive coverage**
- » **Work with the Elgin County Archives to understand the history of immigration in the County**
- » **Moving Forward 2013: Building Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive Communities**

The St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee was established to develop a public campaign to promote multiculturalism in the City of St. Thomas and Elgin, promote cultural

and diversity awareness to youth, celebrate the contributions made by newcomers and immigrants, and acknowledge the contributions made by residents of the City of St. Thomas and Elgin County in welcoming newcomers.

The ST-ELIP team has **worked with the Media to promote positive coverage** collaboratively with local news sources to include immigrant and newcomer stories and experiences. Some examples include but are not limited to:

Elgin This Month - positive stories about immigrants

Rogers TV: What's Up Elgin - interview and total coverage of the Settlement Strategy Launch

Radio De Brigj CHPD 105.9 FM - interviews, English, Low German and Spanish

St. Thomas Journal - coverage of the Settlement Strategy Launch

St. Thomas/Elgin Weekly News - a complete article about ST-ELIP

A working relationship has been established with the Elgin County Archives to understand the history of immigration in the County Highlight history and potential of diversity. As a result the Elgin County Archives will be producing a collection of photographs that show the historical presence of cultural diversity in Elgin County to be displayed at the Moving Forward 2013 event.

The community celebrated the achievements and helped guide the ST-ELIP in the coming year at the **Moving Forward 2013: Building Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive Communities** event. At this event, the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee was officially launched.

Regional and Provincial Partnerships

The ST-ELIP is proud to be a leader in the regional and provincial efforts to coordinate the work within the Local Immigration Partnership network

- » Provincial Local Immigration Partnerships Working Group
- » Welcoming Communities Initiative Paths to Prosperity Research Project
- » South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership

The composition of the **Provincial Local Immigration Partnerships Working Group** is made up of representatives of the Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships, Government representatives and experts. The main goals of the LIPs Working Group (LIPs WG) are: to serve as a forum for regular communication and sharing of research and best practices among all Local Immigration Partnerships, and as a mechanism/conduit, to address both local and broader policy and program issues brought forward by the LIPs collective.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is both proud and committed to represent Chatham-Kent LIP, Grand Erie LIP and Huron LIP in addition to St. Thomas-Elgin LIP in the Provincial Local Immigration Partnerships Working Group.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is a partner in the **Welcoming Communities Initiative Paths to Prosperity Research Project** entitled Pathways to Prosperity: New policy directions and innovative local practices for newcomer integration and attraction.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada awarded a 2012 Partnership Grant to Victoria Esses and a pan-Canadian team of thirteen co-investigators. The project – Pathways to Prosperity: New Policy Directions and Innovative Local Practices for Newcomer Integration and Attraction – will equip local institutions with the analytic capacity to address challenges related to migration, integration, local development, and economic and social sustainability. The project will also help federal, provincial, and municipal governments develop and implement policies for attracting, settling, and integrating newcomers in centres across Canada. The partnership will comprise of a network of five regional nodes – Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, and British Columbia – with the Welcoming Communities Initiative serving as the project's Ontario node.

South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP) is a network of 13 Local Immigration Partnerships in South Western Ontario who meet on a quarterly basis for regular communication and sharing of best practices among all Local Immigration Partnerships in the region. The ST-ELIP had the pleasure to host the SWOLIP Regional meeting on July 20th, 2012.

Promotion, Outreach and Training

Promotion and outreach of the ST-ELIP and its vision has been the focus of this year's work. As momentum grows with the knowledge of the change and influence the ST-ELIP has in the community, we are continually gaining the support of more people, agencies, and businesses. Some of the events and strategies employed are:

- » Settlement Strategy Launch Event
- » Delivered presentations and group discussions
- » Engaged in discussions and invited immigrants who own small businesses
- » Participated at many different events social or cultural organized by the Mennonite Community Services and YWCA Settlement Services
- » Participated at many different business, social and cultural events and conferences organized by SPOs, Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Agencies and distributed printed materials produced by ST-ELIP
- » Engaged in discussions and invited immigrants who own small businesses
- » Presented a deputation to the City of St. Thomas Council on September 10th, 2012
- » ST-ELIP has been very supportive and has taken direct and active part in organizational efforts made by not only the two agencies providing settlement services to build resources capacity (i.e. fundraising and public awareness activities) but also by other agencies who provide non-settlement services and who made any immigrant using their services aware of the ST-ELIP consultations
- » Promotional materials have been translated into other languages (i.e. Spanish, French and has provided simultaneous translation in Low German language in every event when this is required)
- » Community meetings to inform about findings
- » Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event
- » Information Session for Low German Mennonite Community
- » Partnered with De Brigj CHPD 105.9 FM Community Radio Station to promote events in English, Low German and Spanish
- » Use Posters, announcements and social media (e-mail listserv, blog etc.)
- » Used mass media (radio and print) to reach out: What's Up Elgin (Rogers TV) Media coverage Settlement Strategy Launch (St. Thomas Journal and Aylmer Express) Immigrant Stories (Elgin This Month) ST-ELIP Work (St. Thomas/Elgin Weekly News)

Training Attended by Staff

The cross sectoral nature of the priorities requires a diverse skill set. The ST-ELIP team is constantly finding new ways to upgrade skills and gain insight into topics that affect the newcomer population in ST. Thomas and Elgin County. Training which the staff attended this year includes:

- » 1-day Multicultural and Diversity Training
- » 3-day Metropolis Conference
- » 2-day LIP Networking Conference
- » Roots of Racism Workshop
- » 1-day Business Succession, Ontario Immigrant Network Conference
- » 1-day Low German Networking Conference
- » 1-day Elgin Alliance to End Violence Against Women
- » 2-day Migrant Agricultural Workers-Human Rights and Health Care Conference
- » 1-day Enhancing Pathways Conference, Literacy Link South Central
- » 1-day Elgin County E-Marketing Conference
- » 2-day Train the Coach: Recruiting and Developing Culturally Diverse Employees
- » Webinar: Mental Health of Immigrants and refugees
- » Webinar: Building Success for Immigrants with Essential Skills
- » 1-day CIRRO Training



Challenges

The region of St. Thomas and Elgin County has been significantly impacted by the recent recession exacerbated by plant closures and layoffs. This has not only impacted individuals but also organizations and communities in general. People living in rural and remote communities face unique challenges to maintaining economic security. Organizations that used to be the recipients of donations provided by this labour force are now trying to compensate for this loss of funding. These challenges impact the economic stability and prosperity of the whole family and the community at large.

Local leaders in the community, who have tremendous expertise and willingness to collaborate with the work of the ST-ELIP, are focusing their concentration on dealing with the economic hardships experienced by the region. They are currently looking at strategies that generate the protection of declining industries; job creation and increase income for families. We need to continue working with the community in its search for economic and social prosperity, where immigration and immigrants is a key.

As stated earlier, another challenge for our Council is rooted in the fact that St. Thomas and Elgin is a rural community with limited resources. Often, our Council members are also members on many other councils and committees and there is a limited amount of time they can dedicate to our project.

In general, the existence of employment opportunities, social support, language training, amenities, and community response continue to be the key factors influencing both recruitment and retention of immigrants. In St. Thomas and Elgin, we need to work hard to overcome the challenges posed by the lack of some of these key factors. Not addressing this situation will obviously contribute to feeding a vicious cycle: first, immigrants do not choose to live in this region because there are no opportunities, limited supportive services and supportive resources. Then, supportive services and programs may not continue to receive funding with fewer numbers of immigrants residing in the region. The challenge is: What about those immigrants who, in spite of this environment, still decide to reside in our region? How can we continue to attract newcomers to our region?



Overcoming Challenges

Although there is no easy solution, we believe that the way to begin overcoming these challenges is through ongoing efforts to look at the short term, midterm and long term goals for the region. We continue to present the ST-ELIP as an opportunity to connect with each other, build an understanding that raises our awareness, promotes innovation in human, social, political and economic development in our community.

Understanding the restricted resources in terms of community capacity, sector capacity and human resources available, the priorities identified in the Settlement Strategy are being addressed within Service provider agencies in lieu of working groups, alleviating the need for additional meetings throughout the year.

Many rural and small town communities have a wide-range of cultural assets such as creative occupations, facilities and spaces, community organizations, cultural heritage, natural heritage, festivals and events that could form the foundation for attracting and supporting creative sector businesses and jobs. We will continue the dialogue to remind communities that we need to engage on an ongoing basis to develop the strategies and steps required to capitalize on this economic and community development opportunity.



Emerging Needs to be Addressed in the Near Future

While there has been much progress in the past year in implementing the ST-ELIP Settlement Strategy there is a need to continue with the positive progress. Some areas that will be pursued in the second year of implementation include:

Coordination of Services

- » Formalize common assessment and referral system to allow for referrals between CIC funded agencies
- » Collaborate with service providers for accreditation and licensing services.
- » Create an outreach to temporary foreign workers for support, language skills and access to community resources.

Employment-related Services

- » Designate a staff person to work specifically with newcomers who would be referred by settlement agencies (even in small communities).
- » Increase networking opportunities between employers and newcomers.
- » Create opportunities for newcomers to gain Canadian work experience (Mentorship programs)
- » Offer newcomer job market information
- » Raise awareness about benefits of hiring newcomers and using community supports.
- » Develop basic employment readiness tools.
- » Hold workshops on workplace culture for newcomers and cultural sensitivity training for workplaces.

Settlement and Integration

- » Find funding for translation so that information packages can be provided in various languages so newcomers can receive information in their first language
- » Lack of best practices for rural/small communities and information about small town/rural/farm life.

Language, ESL and Communication

- » Take into consideration the uniqueness of small and rural communities: Expand program delivery as rural communities face challenges when sufficient numbers to host traditional classroom style sessions are not achievable.
- » Foster innovation and creativity for smaller group sizes in delivery of English language training.
- » Have more preparation allowance for multi-level/blended classes.
- » Promote Host orientation/field trips. These are crucial to newcomer orientation to the local community. Explore ways to fund this type of activity.

Public Awareness

- » Develop a public campaign to promote multiculturalism in the City of St. Thomas and the County of Elgin.
- » Promote cultural and diversity awareness to youth.
- » Celebrate the contributions made by newcomers and immigrants.
- » Celebrate and acknowledge the contributions made by residents of the City of St. Thomas and Elgin County in welcoming newcomers.
- » Work with schools to promote ethnic and cultural diversity training and awareness.

Support Services

- » Develop capacity to provide qualified and affordable interpretation and translation services.
- » Provide financial support to newcomers/settlement support workers to be qualified interpreters would alleviate this challenge.
- » Create more accessible child minding and transportation in small communities.
- » Generate more funding that would assist in reaching out to newcomers.
- » Find ways to create more resources. Non-eligible clients require support services in our community. With limited resources, service provider organizations cannot continue to serve this client base.

Community Connections

- » Generate Funding to develop volunteering opportunities for professional and community integration
- » Generate Funding to recruit and train volunteers in small communities where agency and support networks are non-existent.
- » Assist newcomers on how to find and access available information, services and resources.
- » Identify and promote the economic, social and cultural benefits of immigration.
- » Provide financial support for community connections in small communities where it is a critical component to settlement.

Moving Forward: Next Steps

Although the change in the level of community involvement from one year to the next is tangible and satisfactory, there continues to be a need to equip community organizations and municipal governments with the tools - analytic capacity and information – they need to devise and implement strategies that address challenges in immigration, inclusion, local development, and economic and social sustainability.

St. Thomas and Elgin's future economic progress and socio-cultural growth will depend on our ability to strategically increase the working age of our population, which is predicted to decline in the near future, without immigration. More specifically, in terms of the ST-ELIP leadership, we need to do the following:

- » Increase cultural competence.
- » Increase awareness of the demographic and economic realities Canada is facing.
- » Elevate awareness about diversity and its potential.
- » Increase receptivity to newcomers by host community.
- » Promote meaningful concept of integration of newcomers as a two way process.
- » Ability to recognize opportunities for change.
- » Develop a vision of long-term change.
- » Mobilize people and resources to create the changes that are needed.
- » Expand number and diversity of cross-sectoral stakeholders
- » Increase participation of leaders, decision makers, and the drivers of public attitudes.
- » Support and involvement from diverse partners.
- » Have an effective governance structure that could enhance sustainability.
- » Continue to build trust among partners.
- » Build effective community collaboration and capacity.
- » Build shared ownership.
- » Hold succession planning for non-profits and service provider organizations.

We hope to continue counting on you as we Move Forward!

Hundreds of St. Thomas and Elgin residents have already been involved in the work of the ST-ELIP for the past two years. Were you one of them? If the answer is yes, we profoundly thank you and invite your ongoing work, support, input and ideas. If the answer is no, it is not too late. Your involvement is key in developing a plan that truly captures the dreams and vision of our community to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities.

It is important to recognize the role of the agencies and institutions that comprise the ST-ELIP, especially the crucial role that the Mennonite Community Services and the YWCA Settlement Services play in responding to the needs of newcomers in our area. The ST-ELIP network is a catalyst for affecting change. Priorities that emerged from the ST-ELIP Settlement Strategy are being effectively implemented. However there is so much to be done!

We want to continue on the path to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities that encourage the sharing of gifts and strengths of everyone and promote a sense of belonging and purpose. We also reflect that in order to function most effectively, we need to recognize, understand, and value cultural diversity. An understanding that our cultural differences are not limitations but rather opportunities to enrich us as we journey to find a common ground and develop a unified vision for success.

As we work together to achieve this, we want to inspire a fresh spirit of celebration. We strongly believe that whether you or your ancestors immigrated recently or far in the past, we each have contributions in building safer, healthier, equitable, prosperous, and more meaningful communities where every member of our community matters.

We hope to count on you to continue building this exciting future!



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