



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

MOVING FORWARD

2016



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 and the members of working committees 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, caring, and inclusive environment.

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

Sustainability – A plan shall be developed to ensure that the work of the STELIP Council will continue to make improvements to immigrants' experiences and the community as a whole.

STELIP COUNCIL

Abe Harms	Mennonite Community Services
Bob Hammersley	St. Thomas and Area Chamber of Commerce
Christian Daboud	Canadian Mental Health Association – Elgin Branch
Cindy Hastings	St. Thomas Economic Development
Debra Mountenay	Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
Dolores Bryant	St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital
Gerry Moniz	Central Community Health Centre
Jackie Van Ryswyk	Employment Services Elgin
Justin Dias	Elgin County Economic Development
Mark Tinlin	City of St. Thomas
Mike Amato	Fanshawe College
Pete Peters	Mennonite Credit Union
Sandra Poczobut	Elgin County Library
Sharen Symondson	Elgin Business Resource Centre
Shelley Harris	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
Vicki Luke	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

STELIP CULTURAL DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Lady Luisa Escover	Juliane Hundt
Iffat Farooqui	Jodi Anette-Kishe
Susan Fortin-Smith	Irena Sompaseuth

STELIP PROJECT TEAM

Rachel LeClair	Project Facilitator
Petrusia Hontar	Project Coordinator
Shelley Harris	Project Director

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Message from STELIP Chair

Dear St. Thomas and Elgin County community,

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) was created to make the communities of Elgin and St. Thomas welcoming, caring, and inclusive. This will be done by bringing the community together to develop strategies for newcomer settlement, to raise awareness of the needs and services of our newcomers, and to create a community dialogue to improve our capacity to successfully integrate immigrants.

We are now entering our sixth year of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership. This partnership would not be possible without the support of newcomers, stakeholders, and community agencies from St. Thomas and across Elgin County.

The STELIP Council members bring a wealth of experience from across the region. The Cultural Diversity Committee is an active group of volunteers who work tirelessly to bring awareness to and promote STELIP and are extremely successful in this endeavour.

Our strategies continue to be developed in consultation with the community and the STELIP Council with a focus on the real issues that impact newcomer settlement. Strategic planning will begin in January 2016 to continue the vision and planning for the next three years.

This report highlights the results of our work this year and our future plans, including the production of *We Are St. Thomas-Elgin* which are videos that showcases newcomers and resources available in our communities. Also the *Walk with Me* event is gaining momentum each year and highlights the diversity and resources available in our communities. Ongoing updates and resources from STELIP can be found on www.stelip.ca.

On behalf of the STELIP Council, we must also thank our staff. Their dedication, hard work and support keep the partnership alive and moving forward.

The STELIP team is committed to developing innovative and local plans in a progressive way to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities across Elgin County and St. Thomas. Please join us in celebrating these endeavours.



Sharen Symondson
STELIP Chair

Collaborations and Support

The success of STELIP is in large part due to the relationships that have been fostered within and outside of the community. Approaching the work from these two directions means that the needs of the community are being met based on promising practices sourced from the LIP network while utilizing the resources that are available locally.

The partnerships that contribute to STELIP's success begin with the agencies and organizations that are represented on the STELIP Council. The action plan that comprises the activities of STELIP are selected and supported by this group with decisions being made based on the resources they have available. While the dedication of the Council is integral to setting the action plan for the year, STELIP also welcomes new collaborations with agencies and organizations in the community. In the past year, events and projects with Elgin St. Thomas Public Health, St. Thomas Elgin Public Art Centre, and the Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic contributed to the growth of STELIP.

The network of support and influence looks beyond local connections and is expanded to include regional partnerships. The most important resources that are available to STELIP are the **South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP)** group and the online network of LIPs.

South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP) is a network of 12 Local Immigration Partnerships in South Western Ontario and the regional francophone immigration network (Réseaux) that meet on a quarterly basis to share promising practices and collaborate. Membership in this group has provided the STELIP with support in moving some of their strategies forward and has generated ideas to implement. Currently projects are being developed that can be worked on collaboratively by the network as a means of resource sharing and benchmarking.

Similar to SWOLIP, the online network of LIPs provides access to promising practices across Canada. Information, input, and advice are shared through discussion boards and uploaded resources. This network provides access to a broader network of LIPs and helps provide different perspectives on challenges and barriers.

To expand the reach of STELIP some partners were established for fundraising initiatives. In the summer months the Cultural Diversity Committee held BBQs to reach out to the community and have conversations in three communities: West Lorne, St. Thomas, and Aylmer. STELIP would like to thank Employment Services Elgin for support at the West Lorne event, Scotiabank for support and matching funds at the four St. Thomas events, and Mennonite Savings and Credit Union for support and matching funds at the Aylmer event.

The fruitful partnerships that have been cultivated over the years have led to effective outcomes that are relevant and reflexive to the needs of the community.



STELIP Highlights of 2015-2016

The St. Thomas Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) has established strategic connections and gained a positive reputation in the community since its inception. In 2016, STELIP is engaging in Strategic Planning to readdress the priorities that were established in the initial phase and update them to reflect the progress that has been made and adjust to the current needs of the community.

At this time, STELIP works to prepare the community to support newcomers; this work is framed within five priority areas: 1. Coordination of Services; 2. Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Labour Market Access; 3. Settlement and Integration; 4. English Language Learning and Literacy; and 5. Public Awareness. The work is implemented by the STELIP Council and is supported by the St. Thomas Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee, and in some instances other community partners for smaller endeavours.

Three initiatives to highlight for 2015-2016 are *Unite for Refugees*, *Walk with Me*, and *We Are St. Thomas Elgin*. The current refugee situation has had a large impact in the community, specifically by creating a dialogue about immigration and refugee resettlement in our community. STELIP has taken an active role in *Unite for Refugees*, a coalition that is working to coordinate resettlement efforts and provide supports to community members. The second initiative to highlight is *Walk with Me*. This has developed into an annual networking event for service providers with the topic of the sessions changing but remaining focused on how to better serve newcomer clients. The event continues to grow and the planning committee has expanded to include the local Public Health. The final project of note is the *We Are St. Thomas Elgin* television show on the local Rogers network. This show shares the immigration journey of local newcomers and highlights local support services that those newcomers have accessed; the episode concludes with a cooking segment showcasing diverse recipes. Each of these projects makes contributions to building welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities.

The following report outlines our progress in the five priority areas in 2015-16. We will continue to build on our existing programs, work with partners to establish new and exciting initiatives, and lay a strong foundation for newcomer settlement as we prepare for the upcoming year.



Coordination of Services

STELIP'S CATCHMENT AREA SPANS THE RURAL COMMUNITY OF ELGIN COUNTY, THE SMALL CITY OF ST. THOMAS, AND THE TOWN OF AYLMEYR WITH MANY OF THE SERVICES CENTRALIZED IN ST THOMAS AND AYLMEYR. TO BETTER SERVE THE POPULATION, THERE IS A NEED FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE AGENCIES. THIS COMMUNICATION IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR AGENCIES SERVING THE LOCAL NEWCOMER POPULATIONS BECAUSE THERE ARE LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT AGENCIES TO PROMOTE THEIR SERVICES AND NEWCOMERS ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF THE SCOPE OF SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THEM.

STELIP PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HIGHLIGHTING THE BENEFITS OF REFERRALS TO SETTLEMENT SERVICES EXPERIENCED BY THE NEWCOMER AND THE COMMUNITY.

Highlights of 2015-2016

- ***Moving Forward 2015: Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities***
- ***Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event***
- ***Elgin County Ambassadors***

Moving Forward 2015

Our annual *Moving Forward* event celebrates the network of newcomers, agencies, and partnerships in the community as well as the achievements of the STELIP. It also provides a venue to collect feedback to prepare for the upcoming year of project implementation. In 2015 the event was celebrated with a traditional smudging ceremony, a local mariachi band, many information booths from local initiatives, and a *Living Library*. This event is driven by the community participation and brings people together to experience the culture that exists in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Walk With Me

The *Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event* was coordinated in collaboration with Elgin St. Thomas Public Health and with support from Canadian Mental Health Association and Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic. The focus of the day was newcomer mental health. The keynote address was titled: "*Changing Perspectives: How to approach Migrants' Mental Health Issues*", providing insight into the mental health challenges faced by immigrants on their settlement in a new County. This year, workshops were added to allow for interactive, in-depth presentations to help front line service providers gain useful information that can be used in client interaction. *Walk with Me* was a valuable experience for participants who indicated that they now have a better understanding of newcomers in the region, the supports available, and how to use local resources. This event has the community support and will continue to raise the awareness of service coordination.



Coordination of Services

Elgin County Ambassadors

The STELIP team attends meetings for the Elgin County Ambassadors group which promotes connections across sectors, specifically with members of the Tourism Elgin Group who work to attract visitors and residents to the area. The meetings provide an opportunity to connect with County residents from rural areas, exchange information about ongoing projects, and collect information.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES PRIORITY IS TO CONNECT AND RAISE AWARENESS OF THE SUPPORTS FOR NEWCOMERS THAT ARE ALREADY OFFERED WITHIN THE COMMUNITY. WE WORK TO FIRST INCREASE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE VARIETY OF SERVICES AND PROGRAMS AND SECONDLY, TO INCREASE SERVICE

PROVIDERS UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF THE CLIENTS. WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS BETTER CONNECTED THROUGH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, THERE IS A GREATER CHANCE THAT REFERRALS WILL BE COORDINATED AND NEWCOMERS WILL ACCESS SUPPORTS EFFICIENTLY.

Did you Know?

Three-quarters of Canada's foreign born population can converse in more than one language; 61% of multilingual immigrants are able to converse in English or French and one or more non-official languages.

Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

English Language Learning and Literacy

While the challenges of settlement are diverse, successful acquisition of language skills remains key to successful integration. This skill allows newcomers to build connections, learn about Canada, and become prosperous and contributing members of the community; indeed, speaking English in St. Thomas and Elgin County is a crucial step for newcomers' social and economic health. English skills will help them find jobs, support their families in their education and social lives, and encourage meaningful communication in their day-to-day lives.

There are English language classes available in most of the county; however, the low density of newcomers in the rural areas combined with limited funding creates a challenge in matching classes to the needs. The community has several elementary schools who offer ESL supports, though the high school level has only one school in the county offering ESL. The adult classes are all multi-level and in the rural area are scheduled around the agriculture seasons. There will be a need to have more language classes available for the refugee

parents at home with their children as the adults are anxious to learn English and find employment. There needs to be more innovative approaches to providing newcomers with the learning resources they need to acquire strong English skills.





Settlement and Integration

WHEN NEWCOMERS ARRIVE IN CANADA THEY OFTEN REQUIRE ORIENTATION AND SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR NEW COMMUNITY. OFTEN THESE SUPPORTS COME FROM PERSONAL NETWORKS THAT EXISTED BEFORE THE NEWCOMER SETTLES, THROUGH CONNECTIONS THEY ESTABLISH WHEN THEY ARRIVE, OR FROM LOCAL SETTLEMENT AGENCIES. LOCALLY, ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN HAS TWO ESTABLISHED AGENCIES: YWCA SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND MENNONITE COMMUNITY SERVICES (MCS). THESE AGENCIES HAVE THE EXPERTISE TO PROVIDE THE MYRIAD OF SUPPORTS REQUIRED BY NEWCOMERS AND PROVIDE REFERRALS TO OTHER AGENCIES WHEN NEEDED. THE STELIP TEAM WORK TO INCREASE THE AWARENESS OF THESE CRUCIAL SERVICES, BUT ALSO ASSIST THE LESS TRADITIONAL OR NON-FRONT-LINE ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS BY OFFERING REFERRAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT.

Highlights of 2015-2016

- *Walk with Me: a Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event*
- *We Are St. Thomas Elgin*
- *London St. Thomas Association of Realtors*
- *Unite for Refugees*
- *Newcomer Events Affiliated with Settlement Services*

Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event

While the main focus of the *Walk with Me* event is the coordination of services, supporting newcomers as they access information is another valuable outcome. Newcomers who attended the event were able to access information and make personal connections with local services.

We Are St. Thomas Elgin

In collaboration with the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board and Rogers St. Thomas, a television show to highlight local diversity, immigration stories, and services available for newcomers aired its first season. This show will have a minimum of two seasons, with the potential to continue. The episodes from season one included information

from the local settlement organizations, community health centre, business resource centre, and library. These episodes are meant to help newcomers better understand services that they can access locally as well as highlight the presence of newcomers and value of diversity to the local community.

London St. Thomas Association of Realtors

STELIP introduced the Newcomer Information Package to local realtors. Realtors often are the first point of contact for newcomers who are relocating. Realtors were invited to share the information on their website. STELIP will continue to engage this group to ensure they are connecting newcomers to local settlement services.

Unite for Refugees

To help support the refugee resettlement efforts in St. Thomas and Elgin, *Unite for Refugees* was coordinated by STELIP and others who had experience with refugee resettlement. *Unite for Refugees* is a coalition of individuals and organizations who are committed to sharing the resources and strengths to create a welcoming community for refugees. They work to support, connect, and organize learning opportunities on refugee sponsorship to ensure that our communities are ready to re-settle and welcome refugee families.

Newcomer Events Affiliated with Settlement Services

STELIP values feedback from the newcomer population and attends events run by, or are affiliated with, the various settlement agencies. Connecting to the newcomer community allows for candid feedback and a better connection.

THE SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRIORITY MAINLY FOCUSES ON SUPPORTING THE WORK THAT IS ALREADY BEING DONE BY THE SETTLEMENT AGENCIES AND TO ENSURE THAT NEWCOMERS WHO ARE NOT ACCESSING THE ESTABLISHED AGENCIES RECEIVE THE SUPPORTS THEY NEED. THIS PRIORITY IS STRENGTHENED AS THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES PRIORITY CONNECTS AGENCIES AND INCREASES REFERRALS ACROSS THE COMMUNITY.

Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Labour Market Access



OFTEN THE MAIN DRIVING FORCE FOR IMMIGRATION IS TO BUILD A BETTER LIFE. TO SUPPORT IN THEIR TRANSITION TO CANADIAN LIFE, NEWCOMERS REQUIRE ACCESS TO SUPPORTS THAT CAN HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET AND HELP LEAD THEM TO SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT. BY GAINING EMPLOYMENT IN A RELATED FIELD TO THEIR SKILLS OR QUALIFICATIONS, NEWCOMERS CAN MORE FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMUNITY, AND ACHIEVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

Highlights of 2015-2016

- Collaboration with the Workforce Planning and Development Board
- Small Business Enterprise Centre Youth Forum
- Collaboration with local Employment Ontario Agencies

Local Employment Planning Council

STELIP is an active partner of the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board (EMOWPDB). The EMOWPDB is a valuable source of statistics and research. STELIP has attended priority setting meetings for the community to help identify the specific needs faced by newcomers in the region. This next year EMOWPDB is part of a pilot project and will be considered a Local Employment Planning Council.

Small Business Enterprise Centre Youth Forum

A Youth Forum was planned by the Small Business Enterprise Centre to obtain feedback on the employment needs, and service gaps, as perceived by local youth. The event also increased awareness of available programs and empowered youth for leadership and entrepreneurship. A youth ambassador was recruited and to represent STELIP in delivering

a cultural diversity awareness presentation to approximately 100 high school students. Feedback was very positive and their involvement in our project continues.

Employment Ontario Agency Collaboration

In partnership with Employment Services agencies, the STELIP team plans to strategize and strengthen relationships with local employers to fill skills shortages. STELIP's objective is to ensure that local employers are aware of new economic immigration streams to meet workforce demands that cannot be filled by local residents. Employers can search an international pool of candidates for particular skills and training.

THE WORK WITHIN THE PRIORITY OF EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND LABOUR MARKET ACCESS WILL CONTINUE TO ADAPT TO THE CHANGING NEWCOMER POPULATION AND TO THE AMENDMENTS IN THE CANADIAN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM. STELIP WILL WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY TO ENSURE THAT THEIR SERVICES MEET THE NEEDS OF THE CHANGES IN THE LABOUR FORCE AS WELL AS IDENTIFY THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEWCOMER POPULATION.



Public Awareness



WHILE THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE FOUR PREVIOUS PRIORITY AREAS IS TO WORK WITH EXISTING SERVICES AND AGENCIES IN THE COMMUNITY, THERE IS ALSO IMPORTANT WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. THE PUBLIC AWARENESS PRIORITY PROMOTES THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY AND THE VALUE OF WELCOMING NEWCOMERS INTO THE COMMUNITY. SOME OF THE EVENTS THAT STRIVE TO PROMOTE IMMIGRATION ARE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE WORK OF THE ST. THOMAS-ELGIN CULTURAL DIVERSITY COMMITTEE (CDC). THIS GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS WORKS TO DEVELOP INNOVATIVE AND INTERACTIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE THE RESIDENTS OF ELGIN AND ST. THOMAS AND TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO THINK ABOUT CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS THEY SUPPORT WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES.

Highlights of 2015-2016

- Declaring Municipalities as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities
- We Are St. Thomas Elgin
- Newcomer Champion Awards
- Canadian Film Day
- Culture Days
- Cultural Diversity Committee Initiatives
 - *Living Library*
 - Community BBQ

Declaring Municipalities as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

St. Thomas, Aylmer, and Malahide held Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Community proclamations and declarations at their local Canada Day celebrations. Along with the declaration, each community was presented with signs that are now displayed on their local service club boards.

We are St. Thomas-Elgin

The first season of *We Are St. Thomas-Elgin* aired on Rogers. The television show highlights the services that newcomer's access, shares true life accounts of a newcomers immigrating to the region and accessing services, as well

as entertainment segment that highlights traditional cuisine from a newcomer. This project not only helps inform newcomers of services that are available to them but also informs the community to better understand newcomers and the skills they bring.

Newcomer Champion Awards

STELIP has initiated annual awards to acknowledge the work and dedication in building a welcoming, caring, and inclusive St. Thomas and Elgin County. The award has two categories:

Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion:

An Individual, group or organization who is working with the community to address the needs of newcomers by recognizing and responding to the needs of the community (one award for an individual and one award for an organization).

Newcomer Community Leader: A

newcomer who is working to strengthen the community and build positive changes by giving back in some capacity in a progressive way, demonstrates commitment to making a difference by creating welcoming communities.

Canadian Film Day

STELIP partnered with REEL Canada and local agencies to host *Canadian Film Day* in the region. This four-day event included Canadian films that had themes of diversity and cultural acceptance and prompted discussions about local diversity. The opening day was held at a local theater and included opening remarks from government officials.

REEL Canada has acknowledged the success of our small rural collaboration and has supported the work as it expands to include more partners.

Culture Days

Public Awareness



STELIP does not have a specific event for *Culture Days* but helps the local agencies participating in this cultural celebration to connect with newcomers and community members that can showcase aspects of their culture. *Culture Days* is celebrated in the libraries across the County and at the Public Art Centre with each venue offering unique activities and experiences.

Initiatives of the Cultural Diversity Committee

The CDC works to promote cultural diversity in the community by planning and implementing unique events. Their work focuses on education and building understanding and acceptance of other cultures.

Living Library

The *Living Library* is an event that enables the community to engage with local newcomers from different cultural backgrounds and immigration experiences. The event facilitates a positive space for one-on-one discussions to help participants understand the motivations and challenges of newcomers to Canada. The participants of the event, newcomers, and community members, found the event empowering and engaging.

Diversity BBQs

Six BBQ's were delivered during summer in three communities with great success. To incorporate the cultural diversity theme to the traditional "Canadian" BBQ, CDC offered over 20 international toppings to go with the burgers and hot dogs. At the BBQ, cultural themed quizzes engaged and challenged the attendees.

THE PUBLIC AWARENESS PRIORITY ENGAGES THE WHOLE COMMUNITY AND FOCUSES ON BUILDING WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AND RELATIONSHIPS. THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES ARE DEVELOPED TO REACH A WIDE RANGE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BUILD TRULY WELCOMING, CARING, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES.



Did you Know?

There are an estimated 19.5 million refugees in the world today. Countries with resettlement programs resettle about 100,000 refugees from abroad each year. Of that number, Canada annually takes in roughly one out of every 10 refugees, through the government-assisted and privately sponsored refugee programs.

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp>

Moving Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

As STELIP becomes strongly established in the community, the challenges and opportunities evolve. Over the years, the reputation of STELIPs calibre of events has led to increased attendance at events and a rise in community agencies seeking advice and collaboration.

The challenges that are currently being faced in this community are in part due to the immigration system reforms, resources for attracting secondary immigration, and supports for the refugee resettlement efforts.

While the small and medium size enterprises (SME) that comprise the majority of the businesses in St. Thomas and Elgin could potentially benefit from accessing foreign trained immigrants through the Express Entry System, they do not have the Human Resource staff to complete the process. The current process requires paperwork for two ministries, which is difficult to navigate for individuals who have no previous relationship or experience with the ministries. To better support the SMEs, information about applications and enriched supports for the process should be explored. The changes to the current immigration system may have a profound effect on Elgin and St. Thomas, a region that historically has had a low representation of economic immigrants. In St. Thomas and Elgin the economic stream accounts for 26% of immigration; in Canada it is 63%. The Canadian shift of focus to economic immigrants may decrease the total number of immigrants coming to the community, slowing the population growth that could be driven by immigration.

Since St. Thomas and Elgin is not a landing community for immigration, there is a need for attraction to the region. Elgin and St. Thomas just received funding to build an immigration portal to help promote the region on the website for Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. This website will help attract secondary immigration as it promotes the resources and opportunities that are available in the region.

Another challenge currently impacting the area is the Syrian Refugee Crisis. There are two Settlement agencies working in the region and as the community prepares to welcome Privately Sponsored Refugees, the additional and critical needs of these families needs to be acknowledged. With few Arabic speakers, the health and mental health concerns due to their long and difficult journey to Canada need to be addressed. In order to offer these families supports, funding and community collaboration is needed. STELIP is working to help coordinate volunteer efforts and has helped establish *Unite for Refugees*; a collaboration that works together to better understand and meet the needs of the refugee families as they settle in the community. This group has been supported by previous sponsoring committees that have a history of supporting refugee families as they settle in the community. Resources and updates can be found at www.uniteforrefugees.org.

While these new challenges impact the progress with our established strategies, we acknowledge that the only option is to move forward with flexible and creative solutions. As we start the process of creating a new Settlement Strategy, STELIP will consider the changes in the immigration system and the support needed for refugee resettlement. Within the community, we will continue to establish relationships across the sectors, build understanding across the region, and promote the goal of economic, political, and social prosperity for all members of our community.

Acknowledgments

STELIP's focus on fostering relationships within the community and developing partnerships with local stakeholders continues to flourish. The role of immigration and the people who support newcomers is being recognized across the county, yet the conversations and changes are just beginning. Every year we receive more invitations to collaborate and to help strengthen the networks and resources of the local community.

We are extremely grateful to our STELIP Council members for their expertise, skills, knowledge, and resources they bring to our work. We would like to thank the members of the Cultural Diversity Committee for their passion and creativity to drive the important and extensive work of public awareness. The many municipalities, community members, organizations, and agencies across St. Thomas and Elgin County continue their ongoing support of our project. We hope that you share your positive experiences with others as we work to bring awareness to the community and its diversity. We thank you for recognizing and validating the important work we are accomplishing.

We especially would like to highlight the dedicated work of the community groups that support immigrants and newcomers in the community, most especially the Mennonite Community Services and YWCA Settlement Services for their support in integrating immigrants to our area. Their continuous collaboration and passion for our project helps the implementation of initiatives to reach and impact the newcomer populations.

We also thank Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for their funding and commitment to building strong and prosperous communities.

The progress in this community has been achieved from the dedication of many individuals committed to building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities!



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

16 Mary Street West, St. Thomas ON N5P 2S3

Phone: 519-631-9800

Fax: 519-631-6411

www.stelip.ca

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