

# Welcoming Cultural Diversity in London

Since 2005, a group of community service providers, government and other stakeholders have been working together to identify local issues and opportunities related to cultural diversity in our community. Under the leadership of the City of London and United Way of London & Middlesex, London's *Welcoming Cultural Diversity* Steering Committee developed a Community Plan in Spring 2006. This Plan identified five priority areas: Income; Neighbourhoods; Social Inclusion; Services and Support; and Systemic Change.

The report is available online at [www.london.ca/About\\_London/PDFs/Welcoming\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.london.ca/About_London/PDFs/Welcoming_Cultural_Diversity_Action_Plan.pdf). This status report outlines activities that occurred in each of these areas since that date, including work directly initiated as a result of this planning process, but also under the leadership of a broad range of community partners, some of whom may not be directly engaged in the work of the Welcoming Cultural Diversity Steering Committee.

## Income

The Employment Sector Council of London/Middlesex struck an **Immigrant Employment Task Force** in 2007 through funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and additional financial and technical support from the City of London and the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC). As part of this work, employers were engaged to lead the Task Force and three Working Groups were developed involving stakeholders representing more than forty institutions. The Task Force called approximately 100 representatives of London's business community to action at an Employing International Talent event on January 25, 2008. Next steps building from the success of this event are being developed.

2006 saw the development of **Skills International**, a unique website designed to assist employers in accessing pre-qualified foreign-trained professionals, with WIL Employment Connections as the lead London partner and including the Waterloo Regional District School Board and Costi from Toronto.

LEDC and its partners developed the **Global Talent** resource, which included the publication and distribution of the *Global Talent Employers Guide* (English) and *Workers Guide* (English and French).

Funding was secured to provide **Job Search Workshops** for newcomers through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program and JSW Program from Citizenship and Immigration Canada in November 2007. The South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre (SLNRC) will provide help to newcomers to increase their networking, resume writing, interview skills, pre-employment skill training, job search plan and other forms of employment assistance.

## Income (continued)

WIL Employment Connections, in partnership with London Cross Cultural Learner Centre and the Association Canadienne-française de l'Ontario (ACFO), opened a new service in London in 2007. The **Access Centre for Regulated Professions** provides all of the necessary resources for internationally-trained individuals to have their credentials evaluated and translated *immediately* upon landing in London. The result will be a training or employment preparation plan for individuals. Currently, individuals do not typically receive this information soon enough in their settlement/integration process.

## Neighbourhoods

Over 40 neighbourhood-level service providers participated in a **community planning and dialogue session** November 30, 2005. Participants discussed issues about welcoming neighbourhoods and what is needed for immigrant to feel that they belong in their new communities/neighbourhoods. The need to access community space for ethnocultural groups to meet was among the top priorities identified by participants.

With the support of Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism & Aboriginal Programs and the City of London, United Way of London & Middlesex conducted a research study to identify the **needs of ethnocultural groups in our community to access community space**. The results of the research have been shared with community leaders including the City of London, London Public Library, Thames Valley District School Board, and London District Catholic School Board. These organizations are engaged in discussing ways to make community space more accessible to ethno-cultural groups.



## Social inclusion & civic engagement

The community plan highlighted opportunities for the City of London to develop and implement a municipal plan that outlines its role as a community leader in fostering social inclusion and civic engagement of newcomers. As part of this ongoing work, the **London Diversity & Race Relations Advisory Committee (LDRRAC)** continues to play a significant role. This includes:

- LDRRAC hosts an annual open house. Keynote speakers have included Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission (2006) and the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (2007). Informational displays by more than 30 community agencies were shared.
- Each March, LDRRAC recognizes stellar work in race relations. Those recognized at City Council's March 3, 2008 meeting were Montcalm Secondary School, Children's Aid Society, TD Canada Trust, London Police Service and the Pillar Nonprofit Network Board Diversity Project.

### Neighbourhoods (continued)

Through funding in the amount of \$15,000, the City of London's **Creative Cities Neighbourhood Initiative** enabled 26 projects to engage in creative and artistic efforts to beautify, bring together and empower their communities. In these projects, cultural diversity and artistic talent were celebrated, blankets were made for the needy and a community association was born. Women, youth and native peoples contributed greatly. This funding brought life, value and community engagement to the City's neighbourhoods.

Since the summer of 2006, over 74 youth from diverse neighbourhoods in the City of London have participated in a **targeted leadership program**. Many of the youth are visible minorities. As a result of this work, for example, more children in these neighbourhoods will now have leaders who speak their language and come from a similar cultural background. This program increases diversity among City staff and provides employment and learning opportunities in neighbourhoods where unemployment and barriers to employment are high.

Through Childreach's **Engagement Strategies for Diverse Cultural Communities** project, funded by Social Development Canada, community leaders from six ethno-cultural groups have been identified to liaise with their respective communities. For example, a meeting between the City of London recreation services and the community leaders was held October 15, 2007. The goal of the meeting was to move beyond barriers toward next steps and focus on concrete solutions and ways to engage. Ideas for improving access to services were suggested included diversity training for front line City staff and the translation of materials.

Through federal Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) funding, the Settlement Services of the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre shall provide **neighbourhood based settlement services and job search workshops** for newcomers.

In 2006, the **London Police Service initiated the Diversity Officer Program** operated by a Constable within the Community Services Unit. London Police Service is committed to promoting a common, professional approach towards building harmonious relationships between the Service and the community it serves. The Diversity Officer is responsible for establishing partnerships with London's diverse communities and organizations which support, promote and address all diversity related issues. As well, the program aims to identify needs within the communities and assist in responses to those needs. Internally, the Diversity Officer acts as a resource for officers around diversity related issues in policing and provides training through various methods.

In the summer of 2007, LUSO Community Services received funding from the City of London to carry out work to address issues of hate, bias and discrimination in the city. This resulted in the creation of the **Anti-Hate and Anti-Bias Initiative (AHABI)**. The initiative was created to raise awareness about hate and bias activity and its effects on both individuals and the broader community. As well, the AHABI supports and assists individuals who have experienced hate in the city. To this end, AHABI approaches issues of hate from a holistic perspective and includes the following: programs and resources for elementary and secondary schools, a Hate Helpline to provide support and advocacy for victims and witnesses of hate incidents, a monthly e-Bulletin and a variety of community programs.

## Services and supports (including settlement)



The **London Funders' Network** identified the importance of examining how to sustain long-term community development versus project funding in order to better support neighbourhood services. It provided good examples of culturally competent services and initiatives in London and other communities and also enhanced the expectations of funded service providers to provide culturally appropriate programs, demonstrated through performance measurement.

In November 2007, a regional **Francophone Funders Forum** hosted by Ontario Trillium Foundation provided francophone service providers with an opportunity to learn more about local funding priorities and processes. Funders had the chance to learn about the needs and challenges of these service providers.

On March 31, 2006, the City of London entered into an agreement with the Province of Ontario to receive \$200,000 to develop an **immigration portal** for the City of London and Middlesex County. The Portal has a two fold objective: to act as a key tool to attract immigrants to our area and to act as a means to retain immigrants who already reside in our communities. The creation of the Portal is a Creative City partnership initiative involving a number of community stakeholders. The Immigration Portal was formally launched in March 2007 with a second proposal for funding submitted in 2008 to enhance its features. London Cross Cultural Learner Centre is the administering organization for the Portal.

### Settlement services

The community receives financial support from both Citizenship & Immigration Canada and the provincial Ministry of Citizenship to provide settlement services for new immigrants.

Provincial funding for the Newcomer Settlement Program is received by London Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) for a community partnership initiative for settlement services. Through this partnership, CCLC and LUSO Community Services receive funding for providing direct settlement services and WIL Employment Connections receives support for providing employment services to newcomers.

### Settlement (continued)

Federal funding for settlement services has increased in our community as a result of the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA). In the past, CCLC and the Mennonite Central Committee of Aylmer were the only recipients of funding for **direct settlement services** under the federal Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP). This year other local service providers also received support. The South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre (SLNRC), YWCA of St. Thomas Elgin and the Association Canadienne-française de l'Ontario (ACFO) received first-time funding for ISAP direct settlement services. This funding also provides support for a **Job Search Workshop Component** at CCLC and SLNRC both offered in partnership with WIL Employment Connections.

Through COIA, there was also a commitment to increase newcomer access to language training and to special language training initiatives. The London District Catholic School Board, Thames Valley District School Board and Collège Boréal all received funding to provide **Enhanced Language Training Programs** in the London community.

In late 2007, CCLC hosted a **War & Political Trauma Conference** (80 participants) with the goal of creating a community model of service support for victims of trauma. The report from this conference was used to help inform CCLC in the development of a pilot project to assist the government-sponsored refugees arriving at their reception centre. The proposal calls for additional human resources to assist with the assessment, services, referral and education of the refugees. It also calls for an educational component geared towards educating the London community, including the health care and social service sectors, about the issues and needs of refugees who have been victims of war and political trauma. The proposal has been successful, with a pilot to begin in the spring of 2008.

## Systemic change

An information and education session with communications staff from various London area and social services, education and health care organizations was held March 6, 2006. Participants explored opportunities to better communicate with and engage newcomers.

With the financial support of the Province of Ontario, United Way of London & Middlesex and the City of London hosted London's **Celebrating Cultural Diversity Conference** in November 2006. Over 300 participants came together to discuss the challenges and opportunities to engage immigrants as part of our community.

There are a number of other indicators that our community is becoming more engaged in cultural diversity and making London a more welcoming community. For example:

- Local media have **increased stories** about cultural diversity. This includes new ethno-cultural media in our community.
- There has been an **increased availability of private sector and not-for-profit resources** in the community related to diversity training and cultural competency. For example, the **Building Inclusive and Accessible Family Services in London** initiative through the Community Services Coordination Network has produced a number of community resource tools and has completed 425 assessments.
- Organizational Cultural Competency Assessments with its five partner organizations.
- Pillar Nonprofit Network's **Board Diversity** training program has worked to develop and foster diversification of volunteers on boards of directors in London's nonprofit sector.
- Increased requests for **diversity training and education** for students, workplaces and organizations.

## Systemic change (continued)

Increased **local research attention** has developed regarding immigrant issues. The University of Western Ontario established a Collaborative Graduate Program in Migration and Ethnic Relations within the Faculty of Social Science and the Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations, which spans faculties across the university. The Centre is funded through the university's Interdisciplinary Development Initiatives Fund, and is slated to open summer 2008.

The University of Western Ontario is also involved in a large-scale initiative to develop a program of research aimed at improving the ability of second and third tier Ontario cities to welcome immigrants and visible minorities to their communities. Part of this work included a conference in March 2008 with 90 participants. University of Western Ontario has been invited to develop a full proposal for funding through the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for Community-University Research Alliance program.



**More information** Welcoming Cultural Diversity is led by a Steering Committee comprised of newcomer service providers and advocates representing employment, health, settlement, government and other sectors in London, Ontario. For more information, please contact co-chairs Mo Jeng, City of London, [mjeng@london.ca](mailto:mjeng@london.ca); Ruth Young, United Way of London & Middlesex, [ryoung@uwlondon.on.ca](mailto:ryoung@uwlondon.on.ca).

As of March 2008, participating organizations are: Association Canadienne-française de l'Ontario, Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism & Aboriginal Programs, Childreach, City of London (co-chair), Collège Boréal, London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, London Economic Development Corporation, London Intercommunity Health Centre, London Police Services, London Public Library, LUSO Community Services, South London Neighborhood Resource Centre, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration, United Way of London & Middlesex (co-chair), WIL Employment Connections.