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Arrival in Canada

While advance research and preparation does seem to reduce the amount of cultural shock experienced by immigrants, arrival to Canada is nonetheless both an exciting and stressful experience for newcomers.

Upon arrival at an airport, dock or land crossing, every newcomer is interviewed by a Canada Customs Officer. The officer requests documentation gathered by the immigrant prior to departing his or her home country, including an immigrant visa. Applicants are required to provide the officer with a list of all household items they have brought with them. Each applicant is then directed to an Immigration Officer to begin the next phase of the process.

The Immigration Officer double-checks the immigrant's documentation, including required visas, and asks a series of questions much like those asked on the Canadian immigration application. The aim is to confirm that each individual is "of good character, and in good health".²² The officer may also ask for proof that any or all immigration requirements have been met — for example, for proof of possession of required funds.

Once the interview is successfully completed, the officer grants authorization for permanent residency and signs the immigrant's Record of Landing or Confirmation of Permanent Residence. Though distribution is not consistent, at this point many newcomers also receive the booklet *Welcome to Canada: What You Should Know*.

LARGER URBAN CENTRES

Immigrants arriving to one of Canada's larger centres, such as Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal, have certain advantages. The larger airports in these cities have onsite Immigrant Reception Services — satellite offices of immigrant-serving organizations. Representatives of

²² www.cic.gc.ca/newcomer

these services greet newcomers upon arrival, invite them to sit and discuss their most pressing issues (often in the newcomer's own language), make contact with newcomers' relatives and arrange appointments with other service agencies.

Immigrants themselves in many cases, support workers are knowledgeable about the stresses and requirements associated with a move to a new country. They provide information about residential communities, services and programs available locally. For example, they advise new immigrants on the requirement to apply for health cards and social insurance numbers soon after they arrive. Immigrants also receive information about free, federally sponsored language training services, and they may be referred to any number of community-based settlement and support services.

RECEPTION AND HOST PROGRAMS

Understandably, most newcomers are primarily concerned with meeting their basic needs²³ — particularly, with finding a place to live and with finding employment. Once they do locate housing, be it temporary or permanent, many immigrants begin to experience shock associated with the move to a new country. Having someone to reach out to in the first few days after arrival is critical.

The Host Program, funded by the federal government, provides support for newcomers, helping facilitate their transition.

Operated by many of the hundreds of immigrant-serving organizations across the country, the Host Program matches an immigrant or immigrant family with an individual Canadian or Canadian family who has volunteered to assist newcomers with their transition. Hosts and host families help immigrants become integrated, locate their ethnic community, practice language skills, learn about their new city or town of residence, and become comfortable with daily tasks such as taking public transportation, banking and shopping.

These relationships provide a bridge between the formalized programs and services of immigrant-serving organizations, and the community in which the newcomer has chosen to make their home. Many new Canadians continue their relationship with their host or host family and with support and settlement organizations long after their first months in Canada.

Beyond these host programs, many Canadian universities offer their own hosting and settlement services for foreign students.

LONG TERM INTEGRATION

The immigrant settlement process continues for years after arrival. Settlement and support service providers offer services beyond reception and hosting to meet immigrants' needs for language training, credential assessment, job training, skill development, life skills training, community assimilation, professional-community affiliation, and labour market training.

Immigration to smaller communities

When immigrants arrive in smaller Canadian communities, they are likely to receive a copy of the *Newcomer's Guide to Canada* during the Customs process. At that point, they are left to begin the process of settlement and integration.

Often in smaller communities, the arrival of an immigrant family has been anticipated and even orchestrated by cultural groups, another family or by the community itself. Indeed,

²³ Discussions with settlement organizations, S. Cosgrove, Winter 2003.

many immigrant families who arrive to smaller centres do so because they have relatives in that community or a job waiting for them. For this reason, it is assumed that immigrants to smaller centres make less use of support or host programs than immigrants to larger Canadian urban centres. This can be researched further in Phase II of the project.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION FOR PHASE II

- IEGs, like all other immigrants, come in contact with a number of organizations when they arrive to Canada. Some groups play a central role in ensuring IEGs are properly supported in their employment and licensure quest but could this be improved and could more groups be involved?
- The extent to which immigrants make use of government-funded services in smaller centres, can be studied in Phase II.
- Greater coordination is required between settlement groups and regulatory bodies. Partnerships — such as the one formed between the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of Manitoba and the Citizenship Council (International Centre) — are valuable.
- Should there be a consolidation of settlement resource and licensure information available to IEGs?