



## **Families in Community**

**A project of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa**

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## **Immigrant Children, Youth and Families:**

## **A Qualitative Analysis of the Challenges of Integration**

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## INTRODUCTION

The present report focuses on immigrant and refugee children, youth and families. Immigrant and refugee families are an important and growing percentage of Ottawa families, but experience distinct challenges. The aim is to increase understanding of their challenges and of the supports they need to improve their integration into Canadian society. The information will be used to enhance the capacity of new immigrant families and their key organizations to overcome stress.

We used a participatory research process. This included input from immigrant families who participated in focus groups from a previous project. Their insights were supplemented with a literature review. The report is divided in three sections: conceptual framework, uniqueness of Francophone immigrant families and challenges of the integration process.

The present report constitutes the first phase of the project Families in Community. It will set up the framework for the subsequent phases, which include the following:

- An analysis of best/good practices for culturally-based family supports by ethno-cultural organizations.
- Supports to good/best practices within 8 pilot projects with small ethno-cultural organizations.
- A resource kit for mainstream family services based on good practices serving new immigrant families.

We recognize that the integration process impacts all spheres in the lives of individuals, families and the society as a whole. For the purpose of this report, the analysis focuses on the social and cultural integration of immigrant families. Information on key economic factors affecting these two focus areas is provided in the analysis. On each area, we address the negative impact of exclusion on immigrant families with a view of opening a discussion and generating a more inclusive process of integration.

We define exclusion as a dynamic, complex, and multi-dimensional process as a result of which certain groups find themselves on the margins of society. This is demonstrated by outcomes of lower economic and social status, combined with a lack of power to change these outcomes. Exclusion is a process and an outcome. It is experienced at both the individual and community level. Conversely, social inclusion assures each citizen that he or she will be provided with the opportunity to fully participate in realizing aspirations. Social inclusion relies on active civic participation to identify the barriers to access and to ensure that people have a collective sense of belonging to their society.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## *Understanding the Concepts*

According to Statistics Canada, an immigrant is a person who is, or has been, a landed immigrant in Canada. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for many years, while others have recently arrived. Recent immigrants (identified also as newcomers in this report) are immigrants who have arrived during the five years before each census (2001-2006 in the case of the 2006 Census). The concept of immigrant families is not included in Statistics Canada's standard definitions. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO) defines immigrant families as those whose major income recipient is an immigrant.

A Convention refugee is a person with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Because of conditions in their home country and their fear of persecution, they are unwilling or unable to return. Canadian immigration policy recognizes two types of refugees: a) Persons who, even before their arrival to Canada, have been sponsored by the government of Canada or by a private group, b) Persons who make their own way out of the country or situation they are fleeing and claim refuge. Refugees have specific challenges and needs in their settlement process, as a result of the psychological trauma and/or physical injuries experienced prior to their arrival. Refugee claimants are temporary residents. The lack of permanent residency limits their access to services.

Canadian immigration policy identifies three classes of permanent residents: the independent or economic class, the family class and the refugee class (protected persons). In 2008, 57.1% of all people who have acquired permanent resident status in Ottawa-Gatineau CMA<sup>1</sup> (Ontario Part) were economic class immigrants (CIC 2008). Applicants in this class are selected based on their economic self-sufficiency. This includes the assessment of their financial and/or investment capacity and human capital (education, command of an official language and work experience). A points system is used to assess the human capital of skilled workers. They constitute the largest economic class category of immigrants. In 2008, they were 87.4% of economic class immigrants in Ottawa (CIC 2008). This percentage included principal applicants, spouses and dependants. Research findings consistently report that the main problem of immigrants in this category is access to employment, despite their assets. In 2006, 66.4% of recent immigrants<sup>2</sup> who settled in Ottawa had university degrees and 93.1% had knowledge of an official language (SPCO 2009). Their lack of access to employment indicates the gaps between immigration policy and the reality of labour market conditions. Thus, many immigrant families cannot achieve self-sufficiency and have had their dreams shattered. In 2006, the unemployment rate of recent immigrants 15 years and over was 14.0%, compared to 5.9% for the general population. In the same year, the unemployment rate for recent female immigrant with children was 21.0% compared to 5.5% of their counterparts in the

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<sup>1</sup> Census Metropolitan Area.

<sup>2</sup> Arrived during the period 2001-2006.

general population (SPCO 2009). A key contributing factor for families with children was lack of access to affordable and flexible daycare.

The principle of family reunification is the foundation of family class immigrants. It is considered one of the pillars of Canadian immigration policy. In 2008 25.7% of permanent residents in Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part) were family class immigrants. This class includes<sup>3</sup> spouses/partners, fiancé (s), dependent children, orphaned brothers/sisters, orphaned nephews/nieces, orphaned grandchildren, parents and grandparents. Separated children cannot claim their parents or siblings. This gap in immigration policy restricts family reunification, together with the fact that siblings are not considered family members unless they are orphaned minors or dependants.

In past decades, the proportion of sponsored family class immigrants has steadily declined. In contrast, independently selected immigrants (using the points system) have significantly increased (Triadafilopoulos 2006). Contributing factors for the decline include drastically long processing time, a family class quota, a growing backlog of applications and increased scrutiny of medical and security checks after 9/11. Tigar (2006) attributes the decline of family class immigrants to increasing neo-liberal emphasis on economic self-sufficiency in Canadian immigration policy. This highlights a market-based definition of immigrant 'value.' It legitimates exclusion and brings a new "problematization" of the immigrant family. The assumption is that family class immigrants are highly dependent on the resources of others: their family, the government, etc. (Lewis-Watts 2006). In contrast, research findings indicate that spouses and extended family members contribute to family income and the settlement process (both financially and with in-kind contributions).

Researchers (Thompson, 2006 and Teledgi, 2006) call for a broader definition of family in Canadian immigration policy based on the extended family. They stress this type of family prevails in most immigration source countries. Instead, the nuclear family predominates in Canadian mainstream society. Furthermore, Sweetman (2006) raises the concern that the current immigration system rests on an old world view where families have a single "bread winner," (usually male) and spouses have minimal or no employment contribution to family income. In current society the contrary occurs. Two-working parents are the economic norm. Thus, lack of support for immigrant families with children to access employment, increases their risk of poverty.

### ***Focus on immigrant families***

The analysis of immigrant families provides a better understanding of the challenges of the integration process. It gives information of their cultural identity, relationships within the extended family, and interaction with their own community and mainstream culture. A significant majority of researchers agree that immigration is usually a family-based decision. This involves members of the extended family. The ultimate goal is to achieve a better future for the children. Thus, an extended family approach will be more inclusive for the needs of children, youth, parents and seniors.

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<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Immigrant families form an increasing proportion of Canadian families. Their diversity in terms of country of origin and ethnicity has broadened in the last few decades. In 2006, 75.1% of recent immigrants who arrived during the period 2001-2006, self identified themselves as visible minorities<sup>4</sup> (SPCO 2009). Four groups comprised three quarters of this population. These were the Chinese, South Asian, Black and Arab visible minority groups. Among their diverse characteristics are: their culture, ethnic group, age at the time of immigration, family relationships and command of an official language. Various studies have raised the concern that Canadian systems (e.g. education, health, legal systems) have failed to integrate this diversity. As a result, families suffer increased challenges and stress during their integration process. These included different practices and beliefs regarding parenting, child and youth development and support for elders.

Many new immigrant families feel their approach to parenting is undermined. They are often not aware of western practices (e.g. the importance of structured early childhood development). At the same time, many mainstream family services are not aware of the distinct needs of new immigrant parents. This results in barriers which prevent them from benefitting from available services. There is a pressing need for better supports for new immigrant parents and for inclusive family support models which respond to diverse cultural approaches.

### ***The contribution of immigrant families to the integration process***

Research has shown that immigrants and refugees who have family members already settled in Canada have better integration outcomes. Family and friends are reported by newcomers as the first or second most frequent source of help in their integration process as noted by the Bergeron and Potter study (2006). As a result, family class immigrants, instead of representing an economic liability as some critics indicate, can be a valuable source of economic stability and social cohesion (shared values, reduced disparities and sense of belonging to a common community). Boyd (2006) stresses the importance of the contribution of immigrant families in “knowing who to go to in order to get things done.” Family reunification can also promote permanent settlement and contribute to attracting and retaining immigrants (DeShaw 2006; Bailie and Denis 2006) “There are three or four centres in Canada that attract the majority of immigrants....The most logical way to make less popular centers attractive to immigrants and ensure they stay, is to create clusters of extended families” (Telegdi 2006).

Lewis-Watts (2006) stresses, that the type and quality of immigrants’ social networks can be just as important as 'human capital'<sup>5</sup> in the success of the integration process. As a result, the negative perception that immigrant communities can prevent social integration (‘turning inwards to form exclusive so-called enclaves’) cannot be substantiated. What is

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<sup>4</sup> In this report we use Statistics Canada’s definition of visible minorities, specifically “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour, other than Aboriginal.” They include: Chinese, South Asian<sup>4</sup>, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

<sup>5</sup> education, language, marketable skills.

generally accepted is that immigrants with large networks tend to have greater access to different types of support and specialized information. This is important for the settlement process; particularly for refugees. Settlement agencies and community organizations can play a significant role in expanding these networks.

A lack of relatives in Canada characterizes many refugees and makes their process of integration more challenging. In 2008, refugees were 12.3% of people who had acquired the status of permanent residents in Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). One in four refugees in the Bergeron and Potter study (2006) reported knowing neither relatives nor friends when they arrived. The coordination of immigrant services is crucial. This provides support for these networks when a large number of refugees arrive. If this system is lacking, the responsibility is transferred to recipient communities, which have no resources to take over this task. The City of Ottawa played an important role coordinating welcoming services for Vietnamese refugees under the municipal government lead by Marion Dewar. The Mayor's initiative was successful in facilitating the integration of these families. By contrast, the lack of a coordinated approach welcoming Somali refugee families, lead to negative integration outcomes. Many single mothers with large families are still struggling with economic and family issues. "We do not think we are listened to at the municipality level. The Somali community both English and French speaking, have difficulties accessing the City services" (SPCO focus groups). One of the recommendations of the 2009 Immigrant Profile of the City of Ottawa published by the Social Planning Council addresses this concern.

*"Recommendation: Investigate the feasibility of a standing settlement secretariat within the City of Ottawa, to develop plans and coordinate a welcoming infrastructure in the event of the arrival of a significant number of refugees from specific countries. This secretariat would work closely with settlement agencies, other community organizations, the faith communities and all municipal departments to ensure preparedness for effective refugee settlement. This office could be aligned with the Emergency Preparedness Office, or could utilize the expertise of this office."*

## **UNIQUENESS OF FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES**

Francophone immigrant and refugee families have distinct needs. They are part of a linguistic minority in Canada. They are a minority of a minority within the Francophone community. The number of Francophone immigrants and refugees varies according to the definition used in the studies. Statistics Canada defines "a Francophone person" as someone whose first language learned at home in childhood and still understood at the time of the census is French. This definition excludes a large number of people, particularly Francophiles, immigrants and individuals from ethnocultural communities. These individuals can use French in their work, studies or everyday life. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa uses a more inclusive definition of the Francophone



community including all these factors. In 2006 Francophone immigrants in Ottawa accounted for 12.3% of the Francophone population. They had the largest number of households with six or more members and the higher proportion of low-income households than the population as a whole (SPCO 2004).

In 2006 (CIC), a significant percentage of recently arrived Francophones were refugees. Ottawa was one of the main cities where they settled.

Francophone immigrants have valuable assets related to their command of French and educational achievements. They have proportionally completed more post-secondary studies than both, the Francophone population and Ottawa population as a whole (SPCO 2004). Despite their assets, Francophone immigrants face various economic and social barriers in their integration process. Unilingual Francophone families living outside Quebec (both immigrants and non-immigrants), have difficulties accessing employment, schools and services in French. Violette (2008) notes the “language shock” of immigrant families facing this harsh reality. This clash may force them to assess the cost of keeping their Francophone identity and consequently impacts their rate of language retention. Francophone immigrants are losing the language faster than native Francophones, as a result of economic survival and structural barriers (Quell, 2008). Participants at SPCO focus groups stressed the need for language training in the second official language for both Francophone and Anglophone immigrants, in order to increase their employment opportunities and thus economic security.

Francophone immigrants do not have the same educational rights granted to official language minorities. As a result, they cannot take for granted enrolling their children in the French school system. There is no formal education policy to integrate them. Access is determined by the Admissions Committee. The Committee's decisions have been criticized as inconsistent. Some children are not accepted because they do not speak enough French at home or their mother tongue is not French (Farmer 2008; Magassa, 2008). Quell (2008) suggests that the administration of the Francophone school system by native-Francophones is part of the problem. “It is as if these Francophone minorities were a separate entity that does not naturally include immigrants and as if these minorities had to decide whether or not they would accept to share “their” schools with Francophone immigrants.” Besides, Francophone families may lack the necessary information to register their children in French schools. “The mothers were busy going through the refugee process and then applying for permanent residency for the first years. For example, one of the things that happened was that some mothers put their children in English schools, because they did not know they could take their children to French schools. They could not speak English, they spoke French. Then it became difficult to help the children with school work” (SPCO focus groups).

The Farmer (2008) study highlights the untapped partnerships with community organizations that could facilitate the relations between Francophone schools and immigrant families. The author notes that the central issue is to provide equal opportunities for academic achievement to Francophone immigrant children. This requires schools to provide supports for their integration. It is worthy to note, that French

schools have implemented a settlement program in collaboration with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The program is expected to outreach to Francophone immigrant families and support young refugees. However, progress would need to be assessed.

Francophone immigrant/refugees families have difficulties to integrate into Francophone communities. Magassa (2008) notes the disappointment of immigrant families from the lack of acceptance by the Francophone communities. Members of visible minority groups, such as Blacks, are more vulnerable because of their ethnicity and higher incidence of poverty (racialization of poverty<sup>6</sup>). Their lack of integration affects not only themselves, but the development of Francophone communities. Francophone minority communities in the country can no longer ensure their growth without immigration, as a result of the aging population trend and low fertility rate.

The issue at stake for Francophone mainstream organizations is not only that Francophone immigrants are part of a language minority in Canada, but also part of the Canadian cultural diversity. Participants at SPCO focus groups stated that language ties all parts of the Francophone community together. However, Francophone immigrants need Francophone organizations to address problem areas and needs from a cultural point of view instead of a mainly linguistic one. Community members want not only to be served in French, but they also want community practitioners to know that they have to deal with obstacles quite different from those encountered by Franco-Ontarians. It is this lack of understanding that led to the creation of services by Francophone immigrant and visible minority groups. Currently the Social Planning Council is supporting the development of the Ottawa Ethnocultural Coalition for both Anglophone and Francophone small community organizations. Key areas of support include capacity building, access to a shared facility and community economic development.

A significant step in the development of Francophone immigration was the creation of the Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee in 2002 by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC). The committee was made up of community representatives, officials from CIC and representatives of other federal and provincial departments. In 2003, the Committee developed a strategic framework with a clear message, “The Francophone and Acadian communities should take on the Francophone immigration issue and acknowledge its importance to their growth” (Belkhodja, 2008). In September 2006, the Committee launched the “Strategic Plan to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities (2006-2011). The five year plan attempts to address the issues raised in this report by taking actions in nine priority areas. Progress would need to be assessed. The priority areas are the following:

- Implementing and supporting local networks
- Increasing awareness of the local community
- Implementing language training in English and/or French
- Providing training to upgrade professional and employability skills
- Research

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<sup>6</sup> Racialization of economic exclusion, particularly poverty, resulting in polarization of economic benefits along colour lines

- Supporting the creation of micro-businesses
- Supporting French-language post-secondary institutions in the recruitment and integration of foreign students
- Promoting immigration and selecting potential immigrants
- Supporting refugees

## CHALLENGES OF THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

“Integration can be viewed as the extent to which immigrants become full participants in Canadian life, capable of achieving their aspirations and potential. Thus the goal of settlement policies and the agencies/organizations that have been developed is to facilitate such integration, and to avoid the development or marginalized, isolated and segregated immigrant groups within Canadian society” (Anisef and Kilbride 2004).

The Social Planning Council recognizes that the process of integration is multi-dimensional and all contributing factors are interrelated. Within this framework, the analysis of this section focuses on the social and cultural realms of integration. “I find that integration is also related to the work and life of the people. I asked this question to people who have good jobs in the government or other fields. They think they consider themselves as normal Canadians. They have a stable life and they would like to spend the rest of their life here. So the sense of belonging is largely related to one’s life here” (SPCO focus groups).

The Canadian Council for Refugees identifies four spheres of settlement and integration that guide service providers:

*Economic integration:* acquiring skills, entering the job market, and achieving financial independence.

*Social integration:* establishing social networks and accessing institutions.

*Cultural integration:* adapting various aspects of lifestyle and engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity, and

*Political integration:* citizenship, voting, and civic participation.

### ***Nuclear and extended family disruption from migration***

“Prolonged family separation is a nightmare experienced by many refugees in Canada, engendering significant psychological, social and economic costs that are borne not only by the individuals affected but also by Canadian Society as a whole” (Dench 2006). The biggest challenges of family reunification are sponsorship’s financial requirements and long delays in processing the applications. Sponsorship places families under economic stress and dissolution. Families unable to sponsor their siblings can never reunite with them. Moreover, sponsorship has increased the vulnerability of families. They must provide a ‘safety net,’ but this restricts access by sponsored relatives to some services. Economic downturns and changes in family income (e.g. unemployment, death of main income earner) put these families at a higher risk of poverty. In the case of refugees,

they have a ‘one-year window of opportunity’ to claim family members without sponsorship. However, if they are not located and do not apply during this period, they have to be sponsored. The alternative of refugee private sponsorships — a valuable initiative of the voluntary sector — is not always viable, because the program can only assist a limited number of cases.

Taledgi (2006) analyses the devastating impact of family separation. In 2005, submissions to the Standing Committee of Citizenship and Immigration described this process as systemic cruelty. During the long-family reunification process, spouses grow apart and children left behind feel betrayed by their parents. The more affected are refugee children living in unstable environments. They may get behind in their education and their health may be compromised. On the other hand, parents waiting to reunite with their children in Canada may feel guilty and may get depressed. As well, many refugee single mothers struggle to keep the family together, while waiting to reunite with their husbands. The Pratt (2006) analysis of family reunification in the case of the Live-in-Caregiving Program, reiterates these problems. Most Filipino women in the study living in Vancouver had university degrees. They held multiple precarious jobs (e.g. housekeeping, cleaning) to support their sponsored families. The reunification was difficult. Some couples divorced. Children were resentful of the separation and frustrated by the lost of economic status of their family. Some of them abandoned their studies for precarious jobs, in order to contribute to family income.

These problems of family reunification require attention. There is a lack of services to support the adjustments when families reunite, particularly in the case of youth. These services are critical to ensure adequate integration outcomes and particularly to prevent family disintegration. Grenon et al (2009) present the following recommendations to improve the process of applications of family reunification, on behalf of the Ontario Movement for Francophone Immigrant Women (MOFIF): 1) change policies to allow children and spouses to join women refugee claimants, and have their paperwork processed from within Canada, 2) improve the availability of legal information about family reunification in French, 3) ease the bureaucratic process, 4) create positions for case workers to follow individual cases and track delays, and 5) enact an ‘action plan to systematically present the findings to all stakeholders within one year.

A particular concern is the decline in the number of parents and grandparents reuniting with their families. In 2008, 330 parents and grandparents arrived in Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). There was a decrease of 14.2% from 2007 (384). As well, the proportion of parents and grandparents in the family class declined during this period (3.8% down from 6.0%) (CIC 2008). Researchers note that opposing views based on the ‘value’<sup>7</sup> of parental sponsorship have influenced this decrease. These views present parents and grandparents as ‘a burden to society.’ Taledgi (2006), points out this perception ignores their centrality in the extended family and dismisses their financial and in-kind contributions (e.g. childcare, labour in family business, volunteer work in the community). Their contributions help families struggling to integrate and this benefits society as a whole. Furthermore, the author states that there is no evidence indicating that

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<sup>7</sup> Not meeting the points system immigration criteria

an increasing number of older and elderly immigrants, will tax an already stressed health system. It is estimated that only 7% of total annual immigrants are in this category in Canada.

### ***Few services targeted to refugees***

Refugees and immigrants are likely to have a different pattern of integration because of their different circumstances preceding their emigration. Soojin You, et al (2007) notes that studies on refugee integration in Canada are very limited and few settlement services specialize on refugees and specific ethnic services. Many services target both immigrants and refugees, though refugees are more likely to require special interventions. For example, refugees may need family counseling and mental health services due to traumatic events. This can be the case for women and children who are victims of rape in war zones. The same can be true for tortured people. Moreover, the provision of culturally-sensitive services to facilitate integration remains a challenge in many areas (e.g. health, social services, education, justice, business and the media).

### ***Lack of access to safe, affordable and quality housing***

Van Ngo and Scheleifer (2004) assert that the home, school and community environments influence the well-being and success of immigrant/refugee children and youth. The SPCO immigrant study (2009) found that a significant number of immigrant families lack adequate core housing, particularly large families. Housing units to accommodate these families are rarely available in the marketplace. Rents are also exorbitantly high, particularly for families receiving social assistance. Furthermore, social housing is not a realistic option, because of long-waiting lists. In 2008, there were 9,629 households on the waiting list for social housing. The average wait time is about 5 years (SPCO 2009). The lack of social housing forces many families to live in overcrowded conditions and in houses requiring major repairs. Moreover, a negative social environment has emerged in social housing, making it more difficult for families to raise their children there. Parents at SPCO focus groups described social housing as a dysfunctional and unsafe place for youth to grow up. Key reasons include lack of the maintenance for houses and parks, the lack recreation and after school programs and presence of violence and drug dealing. Youth participants living in social housing spoke about negative stereotypes at school, in the media and from the labour market associated with families living in social housing. Van Ngo and Schleifer (2004) stress that concentration of immigrant families in neighbourhoods with low socioeconomic status, further hinders young people from accessing a wide range of community resources and opportunities.

The lack of suitable housing for extended families in both the marketplace and via social housing is a problem. Many of these families are caring for their seniors. They seek housing that includes an in-law suite, and washrooms and bedrooms on the first floor that meet the needs of caring for elderly parents and grandparents. These units are not easy to

find and rents are unaffordable for many of them. In 2006, 29.1% of recent immigrant seniors lived with their relatives, compared to 7.6% in the general population.

### ***Intergenerational conflicts***

Assanand (1998) stresses that immigration presents one of the most difficult challenges to parent-children relations and family stability. The adjustment of immigrant families to the new socio-cultural context brings dramatic changes in parenting. Parenting in immigrant families is more complex, because it is challenged by survival needs, changes in family roles, lack of extended family support, and different values and parenting approaches. A “good child” in other cultures may be expected to obey and “respect” their parents’ decisions on their education, friends and marriages. On the other hand, children in Canada learn about individuality, independence and their own decision making. Additionally, Tyyskä (2008) notes that poverty is a major stress on immigrant families and contributes to undermining parenting ability. In 2006, the percentage of immigrant families<sup>8</sup> living in poverty in Ottawa was 20.0%, compared to 11.5% in the general population (SPCO 2009).

Assanand (1998) highlights that the complexity of cultural integration increases in the case of adolescents. They have to deal with the process of identity formation at the same time they are learning new cultural values. They may challenge their parents with their “Canadian” behaviour and opinions and question their decisions and cultural values. Conflicts can arise from the lack of parents’ understanding of adolescence in the context of Canadian society. At the same time, it is difficult for adolescents to understand who they are in the context of their new Canadian identity. As a result, parents’ control of the rebellious stage of adolescence only exacerbates the tension and can destabilize the family. The research findings of Nyemah and VanderPlaat (2009) indicate that family disagreements over children’s acculturation, influence spousal conflicts, breakdowns and children’s decisions to leave home and live independently. Additionally, Assanand (1998) points out that adolescents, who feel trapped in these conflicts, may get involved with the wrong people, run away from home, or even attempt suicide. The author recognizes that conflict between parents and children cannot be avoided. However it can be managed and negotiated.

A major factor in the communication gap between parents and children is their different access to information about the Canadian system and institutions. This gap changes the balance of power between parents and children. It limits parents’ ability to develop a negotiated compromise with their children. This is a key factor in the Canadian parenting approach. The more affected are families with no knowledge of an official language. These families are confronted with a reversal of power roles. Their children translate and interpret for them at schools and with service providers. Parents need access to information as much as their children do. This will help families make accommodations in order to support their children.

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<sup>8</sup> Data for economic families.

Research studies indicate that immigrant children maintain a high degree of family cohesion, despite their generational gaps (Loftus 2005). As such, immigrant families should not be negatively stereotyped as ‘intergenerational battlefields’ (Tyysk  2009). Furthermore, Boyd (2006) highlights the importance of being aware of immigrants’ deep resilience.’ The author explains that this type of resilience is due to awareness and acceptance of family members that they need to make some deep changes. It involves asking oneself some questions, such as “What do I need to learn, in order to cope?” “What must I let go of that isn’t working anymore?” “What attitude will serve me best?” Boyd proposes an empowering strategy for immigrant families based on their strengths (family cohesion, beliefs), rather than focusing on problems. Settlement agencies and family services can help immigrants become aware of their “deep resilience” and build their support on this asset.

### ***Specific challenges of children and youth***

There is an overwhelming pressure on children and youth to quickly integrate into the new culture. However, they lack the support they need. They have to resume their studies as soon as they arrive in Canada. They face a different school system, and in many cases, they have to learn a new language. Additionally, adolescents are under peer pressure to ‘fit in’ while trying to negotiate their identity between two cultures. “Many youth feel torn between their desire to ‘fit in’ with their peers and their desire to meet their parents’ expectations” (Tyysk  2009). A young participant at SPCO focus groups shared his experience. “I am stuck in the middle. I want to have my cultural background, for that is where I come from. I also want to join in the mainstream society...I like to learn about my original culture and keep those values. But we are in Canada. We need to do what Canadians do. If there are not many difficulties, I will stay in the middle of the two cultures.”

Youth in general, and particularly immigrants, are experiencing a difficult transition from school to work. They face greater barriers than their Canadian-born counterparts to acquire the skills and training they need to compete in the labour market. In 2006, the unemployment rate of recent immigrants aged 15-24 was 18.0%, compared to 13.8% of their counterparts in the general population (SPCO 2009). Furthermore, Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) note that immigrant youth in low-income families may feel compelled to get jobs that conflict with school schedules, in order to contribute to family income. This situation could increase stress and compromise their academic progress. Late night-shifts may result in lateness, lack of attention in class or not handing in assignments on time. Therefore, immigrant/refugee youth who work part- or full-time in addition of attending school are at a higher risk of dropping out. In 2006, 14% of young adults aged 15-24 who did not complete high school in Ottawa (early school leavers) were immigrants (SPCO 2008). There are several factors that can help these immigrant youth to stay at school and enter the labour market. These include guidance and tutoring at school, parents’ ability to have jobs so their children can continue studying, income support for working-poor families<sup>9</sup> and access by youth to recreational programs. Equally important is adequate access to labour market information, training and employment programs and

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<sup>9</sup> Families who live below the poverty line, despite working full-time, full-year.

sound racial equity policies in the labour market (Rossiter and Rossiter 2009 and SPCO focus groups).

Madibbo (2005) points out the additional challenges for racialized immigrant children and youth. Visible minorities face racial stereotypes, particularly Blacks and Muslims in the school system, the labour market, media and in confrontations with the police force. These stereotypes reflect a negative image for youth and portray a bleak future. A young participant at SPCO focus groups stated: “Because we are Black some people are somehow afraid of us. They have the perception we can harm them somehow. Hence we are seen by the police as a threat.” Refugee children are further stereotyped in the justice system. Van Ngo and Schleifer (2004) indicates that immigrant youth lack knowledge of the Canadian justice system. This makes them more vulnerable in conflicts with the law. They are unaware of their constitutional rights. They lack understanding of investigative procedures and court proceedings. If they have a limited knowledge of English/French, this further increases the likelihood of misinterpretation in communication. Furthermore, their parents’ lack of access to this information affects the parents’ ability to help their children.

The Madibbo (2005) and Van Ngo and Schleifer (2004) studies show that immigrant children and youth cannot access the support they need, because of systemic problems. There is a lack of an integrated approach of services and of a long-term approach in programming. Most programs are short-term due to funding constraints. Equally important, is the lack of focus on families. Most programs address children and youth on an individual basis. Viewing parents as outsiders weakens the parents’ ability to support their children. Lack of translation and cultural interpretation further restricts access to services. Recommendations presented in these studies include a) developing an integrated and long term approach focused on families, b) improving access to information and outreach, c) developing cultural competency in all services related to health, education, justice and social services, d) establishing adequate approaches to address the needs of refugee children and youth, and e) exploring and capitalizing on partnership opportunities among various actors: schools, family resource centres, mainstream organizations, immigrant service agencies and ethnocultural groups.

Most research studies agree that access of immigrant/refugee children and youth to early child development and recreation programs is crucial for their academic achievements and social integration. However, there is evidence that they have a low level of participation. Barriers prevent their full participation. Obstacles that exclude them include fee-based programs and low subsidies. There is a lack of information about these programs. Parents are also unaware how to access subsidies. Lack of culturally-sensitivity in programming is also a problem. Participants at SPCO focus groups recommended developing free-of-cost programs targeted for immigrant and refugee children and youth. Community organizations could contribute to this process. This would ensure inclusion of children and youth whose parents do not speak either English or French.



## ***Change of gender roles in the families***

Tyyskä (2009) notes that work and family roles change during the integration process. This impacts family relationships between spouses and between parents and children. Families struggling to integrate are unaware that these changes may occur and are unprepared to face them. “It is a difficult situation, because most immigrants come over, try to find jobs and try to settle down. They do not really have the time to learn how to look at this situation. So basically they have no knowledge to deal with it. They just break up” (SPCO, focus groups). The reversal of roles, where the men are unemployed or underemployed and the women become the main earners, may lead to a shift in parental authority. For men, this could mean a loss of their status as heads of households. Additionally, immigrant families experience power reversals as a result of their integration. According to Ochocka and Janzen (2001), parents particularly resent their children playing adult functions. Children become translators, cultural interpreters, negotiators or information providers in the school, health and social systems. Changes in gender roles are possible, but difficult without adequate information.

“I think that some of the early family break-ups may have to do with lack of appropriate support and services that could have helped these families go through a difficult period of their life. Men have been displaced in so many ways, and while women at least have some services they can access in the community, there are no services that men could access” (SPCO focus groups). A step forward is the manual developed by Este et al (2006). The manual aims to increase service providers’ awareness of challenges facing immigrant and refugee fathers and the impact on their families. It is expected, that this manual will assist agencies in developing culturally appropriate materials for immigrant and refugee men, within the context of the family.

Changes in gender roles increase tensions between adolescent girls and parents. Adolescents internalize gender equality values faster than their parents. A main source of information for them is the school, while parents lack this information. As a result, parental pressure on girls to adhere to traditional gender roles creates conflict. Youth participants in SPC focus groups expressed their disappointment about unequal parental treatment compared to their brothers, particularly in case of house chores and recreational time. For parents, the main concern was to protect girls’ safety and ‘good reputation’. SPCO learned that in some cases parents chose to send adolescent girls back to their home countries to protect them from these perceived threats.

Youth participants noted that support to children’s college and university education is a central value in immigrant/refugee families. Children are financially supported by their parents regardless of their sex. Assanand (1998) advocates parents understand the process their children are going through during their integration. Blaming the Canadian culture does not solve the problem. It is essential to learn about parenting approaches of immigrant/refugee families. Parents need access to information regarding the Canadian parenting approach.

Two issues that deserve more research are abuse of immigrant children and seniors. The Tyyskä (2009) study of Punjabi and Tamil communities in Toronto found that the most common forms of child abuse were physical abuse and harsh socialization of traditional values. This was particularly the case for female children. In the case of seniors, different types of abuse prevailed. One example was behavioural abuse. This included being ignored or neglected or being treated disrespectfully. More research is needed to identify how these experiences relate to immigrant seniors' isolation, lack of access to services and changes in their role in the extended family. Additionally, the definition of senior abuse should include a culturally-sensitive approach. In some cases, where immigrant seniors are contributing significantly through unpaid work within the household, this could be considered senior abuse in the Canadian mainstream society, but is viewed by immigrant seniors themselves as contributions to their families. As such, many families may be unaware that something they are doing is considered abuse in Canada and should be corrected. Opportunities to learn and discuss Canadian values should be open to seniors. In many cases they are contributing to raise grandchildren, with or without the parents present. In the case of abuse against children, it is critical to develop parents' awareness of Canadian parenting values and approaches and legal issues related to parenting.

The Tyyskä (2008 and 2009) studies indicate that tensions from role reversals in the family could launch gender-based violence. This affects women worldwide across all sectors of the population. There are factors that are unique to the immigration process. These include changes in gender roles, economic dependency of spouses as a result of sponsorship, poor housing and general lack of resources due to economic hardship. There are valuable services in different languages offered to victims of gender-based violence in Canada, but a preventive approach is missing. Families need to be aware of the consequences of gender-based violence. It is a criminal act and has severe impact in family disintegration. When immigrant families separate, women usually become the custodial parents. They bear the burden of raising their children alone and the risk of poverty of single families. Female single parent families have the lowest incomes and the highest poverty level in Ottawa. Immigrant men guilty of gender-based violence have few rehabilitative options. They cannot access culturally-sensitive programs. Moreover, they bear the weight of isolation. They do not have their children and they are cut from the extended family in Canada.

Kamateros (1998) states that immigrant families have difficulties disclosing family conflicts and getting appropriate help. This is the case with family violence and their children's conflicts with the law. Fear, shame and lack of trust prevent the disclosure. As a result, families' fear community censorship and distrust mainstream institutions that intervene (e.g. Children's Aid Society and the police). Moreover, victims of violence fear losing extended family support. There is a lack of awareness of Canadian family law (e.g. family violence legislation and Young Offenders Act). Another factor preventing disclosure is the spouses' lack of knowledge of their immigration status. For example if a victim of violence has been sponsored, she cannot be deported, but she may not know this. Language barriers prevent access to services. Tyyskä (2009) notes that fear of community censorship prevent immigrants accessing culturally-sensitive services. This

is unfortunate. Community organizations best understand the cultural context of abuse and the needs of the victims. These organizations should consult community members to develop a confidential approach that meets their needs to disclose conflicts. Another approach could be collaboration with mainstream organizations. More attention should be given to prevention of gender-based violence by reaching out to men and extended family members. Somali community organizations may have some valuable lessons to share in facilitating disclosure. “In the early days of immigration, people used to hide their problems, for example if a kid is having difficulties at school or having problems with the police. The parents did not want to share that information. But today they come to us and tell us what the problems are” (SPCO focus groups).

### ***Challenges with the education system***

“What the map of Somalia got to do with a child who is feeling excluded in a classroom in Ottawa?” (SPCO focus groups).

The educational system has an important role to play in promoting settlement and integration. Anisef and Kilbride (2004) advocate the need to identify why and how the education system fails to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee children, instead of trying to ‘fit’ them into the existing educational system. The author stresses that poor grades are not only the result of lack of language skills. They are diverse reasons relating to the school system, to economic integration, and health issues. Factors related to the school system include, the lack of a diverse perspective in the curriculum, inadequate testing methods, teacher biases and lack of cultural awareness in disciplinary decisions. Factors affecting the economic integration include economic insecurity, unemployment, underemployment and the incidence of poverty. Moreover, the health of immigrant and refugee students is compromised by stress and depression from the events preceding their immigration. Many refugee students also bear the burden of interrupted schooling, which jeopardizes their educational success.

Van Ngo and Scheifler (2004) state that immigrant children and youth have inadequate access to culturally competent support at school. Often, decisions regarding language instruction and services are taken at the discretion and political will of individual school administrators. Thus, school services for immigrant children and youth are usually provided on an ad-hoc basis and given low priority. Anisef and Kilbride (2004) indicate that some visible minority youth face significant challenges coping with the school system. “They perform poorly in class, suffer from behavioural problems or drop out of school altogether. Some of the principal factors underlying these problems include school policies, the discriminatory attitudes of teachers and the organizational structure of school where the achievement or success among minority youth is not encouraged. The environment has proven to be a negative one for newcomer’s students. It has led to poor attendance, fostered feelings of hostility towards school and produced an increase in delinquent behaviour.”

The Tyyskä (2009) study indicates that children of recent immigrants and refugees are at a higher risk to drop out, fail, be suspended or streamed into non-academic courses.

Youth participants in SPCO focus groups reiterated this problem. Some reported being placed in ESL classes, despite the fact that English was their mother tongue. In other cases, qualified students were discouraged from taking the courses that would allow them to enter the university.

Van Ngo and Scheleifer (2004) note the challenges of school placement of older refugee children with interrupted schooling. The age-appropriate placement without adequate supports can leave them at loss in their classes. On the other hand, if they are inappropriately placed in classrooms with children several years younger, they may experience socio-psychological difficulties. As a result, some immigrant children may be unable to complete their high school and become disadvantaged in the labour market. There is a need of an integrated approach in the school system to improve the integration of immigrant/refugee children and youth. Anisef and Kilbride (2004) state that schools are critical for both, education and provision of services for these students. Schools have close contact with them on daily basis and could be the point of access to services. Tyyskää (2009) recommends schools boards to boost funding for translation and interpreting services, in order to improve communication with immigrant/refugee parents. Moreover, schools with high immigrant populations should have full-time settlement workers to help new families adjust to life in Canada and navigate the school system.

Teachers and immigrant families have different expectations on the role of parents, teachers, students' behaviour and structure of the family. This communication gap disenfranchises parents and confuses teachers. For example, in Somalia the school was responsible for the completion of children's homework. Parents were not supposed to take this responsibility. Many immigrant/refugee parents in Canada even if they want to get involved, may lack language skills to support their children's homework. Other parents may lack knowledge of the specific subject and lack access to tutoring services. On the other hand, teachers feel disappointed by parents' requests outside their defined roles. For example, some teachers are contacted regarding disciplinary issues at home, because they are authority figures in other countries. Another difference is the concept of family. In the Canadian school system the concept of the nuclear family prevails, whereas the extended family is typical in the case of immigrants and refugees. As a result, extended family members caring for children are not supposed to represent parents at parent-teacher interviews. Moreover, Shor and Benhard (2003) highlight the communication gap from the different meanings of education across cultures. In Western countries the concept of education is mainly focused on academic objectives. By contrast, when immigrant/refugee parents refer to education, is not only about academic learning. Some parents want 'values training,' character building and moral training.

The existing communication gap between school and immigrant/refugee parents compromises their children's future. Research has shown that key contributing factors are lack of a culturally-sensitive approach and information on how the school system works in Canada. On the other hand, teachers face a lack of comprehensive information on immigrant family dynamics, expectations, customs and traditions. This situation is compounded by the fact that teachers at schools do not reflect the increasingly diverse student population. Shor and Bernhard (2003) list the following culturally-based

disagreements between teachers and parents on disciplinary actions: a) the types of misbehaviour which justify intervention by teachers, b) the kind of disciplinary measures which should be used, c) the cultural factors that should be considered when deciding about disciplinary actions, and d) the lack of sensitivity to the impact of immigration related difficulties on the behaviour of children.

The lack of effective communication and a culturally-sensitive approach impact parents' participation in school meetings or school councils. Schools are defining parental participation and what a 'good parent' is (Farmer 2004). As a result, teachers view the absence of parents in meetings as lack of interest in their children's academic progress. However, they ignore that many parents have conflictive work schedules and hold multiple jobs to support their families. In some cases, the school has worsened this situation by transferring the responsibility to inform parents to their children. They have become intermediaries between the school and the family. This is a heavy responsibility that compromises children's academic achievements. It creates power reversals in the families and feeds conflicts between parents and children. An alternative to parent's participation is to encourage and support the participation of an extended family member involved in the care of the child. As well, it is important for schools to work with grassroots ethnocultural groups to make the school environment more inclusive.

Parents have also become disenfranchised from school, because of the perception that school dismisses their cultural values and parenting approaches. This is particularly the case with respect to values regarding discipline and respect and children being independent. Many parents at SPCO focus groups resented their children's attitudes, even little ones. They said "you are not my boss", when asked to do some chores. In other cases, parents complained about their children threatening to call 911 or Children's Aid Society when a disciplinary issue was raised. Moreover, parents are disappointed by the lack of discipline in class and lack of 'respect' to teachers that is permitted in school. They feel this situation has negative consequences for their children's behaviour at home. On the other hand, teachers may find it difficult to approach some parents about a school issue, because of fear of harsh punishment. "You don't want to tell a parent, 'Your daughter is missing class because she's got a boyfriend,' because well, the first thing the father is going to do is take her out of this school and put her in an Islamic school, or worse, he's going to send her back to Pakistan and there she goes" (Tyyskä 2008).

The Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) study consider bullying<sup>10</sup> at the school a significant problem that prevents the integration of immigrant/refugee children. The more affected are refugee children and children from racialized groups. Physical violence in response to bullying in schools with zero tolerance policies, puts them at risk of suspension or expulsion. These policies are highly criticized by immigrant/refugee parents. Parents note that often immigrant children involved in a fight as a result of bullying are disciplined, but not the student who did the bullying. Further, studies indicate that disciplinary policies are not well-understood by parents and children. The authors, state that school policies in this case emphasize exclusion and punishment. They advocate for a restorative response to both bullying and discrimination to stop their negative

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<sup>10</sup> verbal bullying, name-calling and teasing.

consequences. Bullying and exclusion leave immigrant youth with few options, where antisocial peers could be perceived as attractive alternatives. Protective factors to reduce their vulnerability include, family and community supports (e.g. mentors and role models), breaking their cycle of poverty and opportunities to develop relationships with trusted adults and pro-social peers. The study emphasizes the value of individual resilience and the capacity of immigrant and refugee youth to succeed in the face of adversity.

The Shor and Bernhard study (2003) highlights immigrant parents' concerns about the school's lack of interest in children and youth as persons. Instead, school emphasis is on compliance of rules and regulations. As a result, disciplinary actions at school tend to focus on symptoms of the problem, not on the causes. Consequently they disregard difficulties that immigrant/refugee children face in their integration. Failure to take this into consideration can lead to inequality of punishment, with immigrant children and youth being more affected. A one-way integration approach predominates. Immigrants are the only ones who need to adapt to the rules and policies of the host society, which are not questioned, just followed. Instead migration is a two-way approach linking two different sets of cultural values. Thus, an effective integration requires building reciprocal channels of communication between educators and immigrant parents regarding disciplinary issues. According to the authors, the ways in which children are being socialized and disciplined at school need to be reconsidered, including Western professional standards of what is 'appropriate.' Educators should also learn about educational approaches in other countries, before disciplining a child who 'misbehaves.' Educators should also learn about the impact of barriers facing immigrants/refugees with behavioural problems exhibited by children and youth. The authors emphasize that in the current diverse society the 'one size approach fits all' in the school system is dysfunctional. It excludes many students and increases inequalities.

Van Ngo and Scheifler (2004) stress the importance of ensuring adequate integration of immigrant children and youth. Demographic trends highlight their strategic importance for the future of Canada. Thus, Canadian institutions cannot risk being part of the development of a sub-culture of defeat and marginalization of immigrant children and youth. The authors stressed the need of federal leadership to champion a national strategy that focuses on the education, resettlement and integration of immigrant children and youth.

### ***Inadequate support for immigrant seniors***

The senior population is increasing faster as a result of the aging population trend. It is becoming more diverse due to increasing importance of immigration. In 2006, 30.9% (31,195) of the City's general senior population were immigrants. Immigrant seniors are not a homogenous group. Factors related to their diversity include the following categories: ethnic group, number of years in Canada, knowledge of an official language, refugee or immigrant status, incidence of poverty, presence of sponsorship and extended family. Durst (2001) stresses that health and social systems have failed to integrate this diversity. Most mainstream services and programs are offered in English or French.

Thus, they exclude Allophone seniors. Community organizations have to step in to fill this gap, but do not have the financial resources. As a result, many Allophone seniors are isolated, particularly seniors living alone. “Conditions of our seniors are bad. A person marries, has kids, works and then reaches an age when he/she wants to benefit from the contribution they have made, whether it would be a pension, or if their children will take care of them, or the community cares for them. All of these levels of contributions no longer exist for many of our seniors. In addition, nowadays, nobody listens to the senior. Historically in Somalia the children help their parents once the parents retire” (SPCO focus groups).

Moreover, immigrant families caring for their seniors, cannot access the support they need, such as culturally-sensitive services and cultural interpretation. Additionally, participants in SPCO focus groups noted that ESL methodologies and teachers materials are not adapted to seniors, which can contribute to poor language skills. As well, participants at the focus groups advocated for changing the practice of mainstream organizations carrying out surveys on Allophone seniors’ needs in English and French. They cannot speak the language and thus cannot express their needs.

VanderPlatt et al (2009) argue that little attention is given to immigrant parents and grandparents’ needs, because of their perceived marginal contributions and gendered nature. In practice the contrary occurs, but it is not evident. A main factor is the dominant definition of immigrants’ contribution as economic. Thus, there are no models to measure non-economic contributions of parents and grandparents. These contributions include homemaking, caring for a family member, childcare, labour to family owned business, volunteerism and informal networking. These actions are critical to support the economic well-being of immigrant/refugee families. This lends support for the participation of family members in the labour market and the achievement of educational goals. It also builds social cohesion and social capital. The author's study showed that 40% of parents and grandparents are working or self-employed after two years in Canada. Participants in SPCO focus groups stressed that seniors have joined the labour market and contributed with their unpaid work to the integration of their families. They have the right to age with dignity. They need to have access to services and programs that meet their needs. Moreover, culturally-sensitive programs need to take into consideration their specific gender needs. Female seniors are the majority in the general and immigrant populations, particularly in the older age brackets.

### ***A vibrant and diverse collection of community organizations***

The Ottawa Mosaic study (SPCO, 2004) provides a snapshot of a vibrant and diverse collection of community organizations addressing a wide variety of issues. They use different strategies to improve the quality of life of their members and, in many cases, of the broader community. They serve a broad cross section of distinct communities making up Ottawa’s immigrant population. For example language spoken is one dimension of diversity. In 2006, nearly 69 languages, in addition of English and French, were reported as mother tongues among the immigrant population (SPCO, 2008). Just half of the organizations which responded to the survey had a mandate which was

specific to a particular population of immigrant or visible minority community members. There was representation within the sample of organizations addressing the particular needs of women, youth or seniors. Many respondents identified that one of the most important elements in their ability to do their work was the language capacity of their staff.

Many of the community assets identified were services or facilities intended for the general population. This highlights the fact that many mainstream services have implemented practices so they are more accessible to diverse members of the community. While there is considerable work yet to be done in this regard, the Mosaic study showed that there has been substantial progress in recent years.

The breadth of collective experience is a central element in asset based community development, social capital strategies, and more recently in recommendations for alternative social planning.<sup>11</sup> Each of these processes is based on an assumption that communities know best how to deal with their issues. As a result, sharing of strategies is a powerful tool for building the capacity of communities to take action. Moreover, effective change is most likely when communities are given adequate support to enable them to act on their particular concern and share among groups their collective understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a tendency to view the integration process as a short-term process, focused on immediate needs, such as housing, ESL/FSL, employment and income support. However, this report has shown that many of the issues addressed require a long-term approach. Such an approach is necessary to achieve integration at all levels, cultural, economic, social and political. The immigration process has far-reaching consequences that include second and third generations that cannot be ignored. As well, Canadian demographics indicate that economic growth and increase of the workforce in the near future will significantly rely on immigration. Therefore, the future of immigrant/refugee children and youth concerns all citizens.

A successful integration of immigrants and refugee families requires not only a focus on recruitment, but also on barriers preventing their integration at all levels. Family support and social networks have proved to be crucial to facilitate the integration process. Thus, the contributions of the extended families should be valued and recognized. Integration services should be provided within the context of the family and not just to individuals as separate entities. This holistic approach will strengthen the family unit. There is an agreement that the main barrier to successful integration of immigrants is adequate and sustainable employment. The lack of it increases the likelihood of a family living in poverty.

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<sup>11</sup> See: Chatterjee, Alina et al, *Alternative Social Planning: A Paradigm Shift Developing an Inclusive Healthy Toronto*. Toronto: Alternative Planning Group, Feb. 2004, page 4.



The school system has an important role to play in facilitating the integration of immigrant/refugee children and youth. As well, it can make a significant contribution in assisting their transition from school to work.

At the centre of intergenerational tensions and family conflicts is the lack of a preventive approach. Family units are disrupted by the lack of awareness of the challenges of migration and lack of supporting services. Culturally-sensitive services are central to facilitate the integration and prevent exclusion of immigrants and refugees; in particular, seniors. There is a concern, that the needs of immigrant fathers have been overlooked in the integration process.

Community organizations have an important role to play in the integration process. However, they lack sustained and adequate funding. Funding cutbacks have weakened service delivery, while the number of immigrants and refugee families has increased steadily. There is a need for a concerted effort between all stakeholders at the public, private and community levels, in order to develop an integrated and long-term approach to integration focused on families.

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