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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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•(1610)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call to order the 151st meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of settlement services across Canada.

Our apologies to the witnesses. Unfortunately, we had a vote in the House of Commons. We are doing our best.

Because we are faced with another vote, we are going to concentrate on getting the presentations in and maybe a very quick, lightning round of questions to make sure we can get both panels in today. We are expecting bells at 5:15.

A voice: It might be 5:30

The Chair: Okay, we'll check on that.

Today, we have a bit of an education theme that we're working on. We'll start with Ms. Hart from the Burnaby School District. Welcome.

Ms. Heather Hart (Assistant Superintendent, School District 41, Burnaby School District): Thank you.

Good afternoon. I'm an assistant superintendent in the Burnaby School District, and I work in the area of settlement services, supporting both settlement workers in schools and language instruction for newcomers to Canada.

LINC began in Burnaby in 1992. It was federally managed and funded. In the year 2000, the federal government turned our funds over to the province to manage. In 2014 the federal government repatriated the language instruction as part of the settlement umbrella.

As with the SWIS, we feel that the current contribution agreement restricts the movement of funds and has onerous reporting schedules. We are not assured that enough funds or resources would be available for unexpected situations. We believe a more flexible model is needed.

Language training benefits newcomers by helping them develop the skills to successfully integrate and contribute to Canada, both socially and economically. Language is social currency.

From the graph, you can see that we have a diverse population of students from around the world. This is also reflected in the fact that 33% to 38% of our students are refugees and require more support

for learning. A student is not a student, is not a student. They are funded the same way, but they need more time and resources. We're finding that more of our students arriving are unable to read and write and have no numeracy or literacy skills, or general knowledge.

The LINC classes have some options. Students can attend full-time or part-time, have face-to-face or blended programs—some are face to face, and some work online. They can attend day or evening classes. There are general language classes that focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing—from literacy to level eight. The instruction focuses on literacy and language for clients who have trouble reading and writing in any language, and on advancing job-specific language skills to help clients succeed in the workplace.

All LINC classes include a focus on real-world tasks and deal with practical topics and applications. Students are assessed on reading, writing, listening and speaking. Some tasks are designed so that more than one literacy component can be assessed at once. For example, you could take a 911 call, where the students are assessed on their ability to listen and speak. Reading and writing may also be required for this task.

Assessment is based on the evidence in the students' binders. Students are assessed on proficiency skills, as described in the Canadian language benchmarks guide, by completing the required number of successful artifact tasks. The goal is to have students take ownership and responsibility for their learning. Students also complete both self-evaluations and peer evaluations.

In the classroom, they have access to laptops and iPads, and are able to use their own devices.

Students improve their English language literacy through community involvement and making connections to Canadian culture. They go on field trips and have guest speakers. We've had the RCMP in and the British Columbia Institute of Technology and Nursing.

Students in one of the LINC classes took it upon themselves to raise money for the Fort McMurray fire victims. Although they have very little themselves, they raised \$700 for this cause.

Licensed childminding provides a setting where young children are cared for down the hall from where parents are learning. This is extremely important for mothers and fathers who have lived through war and experienced trauma first-hand.

There are also situations where there are multiple children in the home, and it makes it very difficult for these newcomers to find child care and to be able to learn. We have Afghan families that have an average of seven children. Without this service, it would be impossible. Meanwhile, their children are down the hall in the childminding room, and they're learning how to work with other children and practise their English language literacy skills.

With regard to the benefits of a blended model, from September 2017 to June 2018 our district was involved in a research demonstration project funded by the IRCC to examine and demonstrate the effects of blended learning for students, teachers and the program. It involved three classes and 45 students. Students noted from this that they developed knowledge and confidence in using technology for language learning and settlement needs. They were more engaged and motivated in the learning process. Tasks had real-life application. Online platforms created both formal and informal learning opportunities and connections with other students. They could do advanced learning online to better prepare for face-to-face classes and learn new vocabulary and pronunciation. Flexible schedules allowed students to maintain much-needed employment while learning English. Online assignments teach students how to work on a platform. They in turn can help their own children with these things. Teachers noted a higher level of student engagement in learning and retention, better attendance rates due to flexibility in online learning and childminding, and improved student access to settlement and language with increased opportunities for blended learning. They felt it empowered the students in both English-language learning and technology skills. As one of the LINC students put it, it's the best method for learning in a modern society.

As for the challenges, teachers reported that the type of planning needed for online lessons or for a blended approach took a lot of time. More time was needed for paid preparation and professional development. They also needed to learn how to teach students to read and write, because a number are at a low level. Students reported that more extended opportunities at LINC 7/8 would be valuable for them, as would more inclusion of blended activities accessed via mobile devices and apps.

I will leave you with a bit of a testimonial from one of our students. I won't read the whole thing, but the last line says, "We will do our best to help others and to contribute to Canadian society." I'll leave it to you to read the rest.

Thank you.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Windsor and Ms. Reddy.

Ms. Val Windsor (Chair, English Language Learners Consortium): Thank you.

We recognize that Ottawa is located on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation.

I'm Val Windsor. I chair the ELL Consortium. I'm also an elected school trustee from Delta.

My colleagues are Jennifer Reddy, who is a Vancouver School trustee, and Heather Hart, an associate superintendent of Burnaby. We overlap here.

First of all, thank you for the opportunity to bring before you the concerns of the Metro Vancouver/Fraser Valley ELL Consortium about settlement service criteria and funding.

The consortium is an ad hoc committee of the B.C. School Trustees Association, consisting of elected school trustees and staff whose expertise is in the area of English language learners.

Imagine two students who are new to Canada sitting in desks in the same classroom. Both students are entitled to the same support that the school system has to offer through its professional staff. However, only one student's family is eligible for IRCC-funded settlement services.

In spite of this difference in eligibility for service, many of our school districts, through settlement workers in our schools and other staff, are doing their best to provide what services they can for ineligible families. Often, they are forced to prioritize the needs of these families and then refer them to external settlement agencies that are likewise stretched.

Funding is tied to specific goals and commitments made in the competition for contracts. Flexibility is needed in the funding for settlement providers to best meet the needs of an always-changing clientele and demographic. The newcomers we are assisting now will not have the same needs as those who arrive after the contracts have been awarded.

The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle represent the complexity of settlement needs. A single family with greater needs will access many of these services. Some of them will access hundreds of services, and yet others will need very few: 20 or so. Each service is necessary to help the family navigate not only a complex education system but other aspects of their lives that are equally challenging, as the jigsaw puzzle indicates.

In 2007, the federal government, through the Canada-B.C. Immigration Agreement, directed settlement funding to the Province of B.C. for distribution. The provincial government awarded contracts to school districts and other settlement agencies, giving them the flexibility to manage the funds as they were needed. If any funds remained at the end of the provincial fiscal year, they were carried over to the following year.

Newcomers were served by the Province of B.C. through settlement programs between 2007 and 2014. Permanent residents are those for whom the funding was targeted, but other newcomers were served as well because of the flexibility in the use of the funding.

In 2014, the federal government repatriated the funding for settlement programs and informed settlement service providers that while they were welcome to provide services for ineligible newcomers, the funding was specifically targeted for permanent residents—as it had always been—and they were changing the way the funding would be distributed and spent.

We are proud of the wraparound settlement services provided in our school districts. With schools being the first point of contact for newcomer families, access to services can be arranged in a short period of time, which is a benefit to the student and the family as they are helped to integrate into their schools and communities.

We have concerns about the current funding model. School districts, like settlement agencies, now have to compete for funds through a national call for proposal process. Although the contract specifies a negotiated amount, some of it is received as supplemental funding that is released in small amounts, with little lead time and with rigid guidelines that impact a district's ability to plan for staffing and program delivery.

- (1620)

Another issue for school districts is that federal budgets do not align with provincial school calendars. Funding expires on March 31 and schools operate until June 30, leaving a three-month unfunded gap for students and families. This has caused significant anxiety in some of our school districts such as Surrey, for example, as ours is a unionized environment, and without a guarantee of a contract, they are looking at having to lay off staff in their settlement programs and close their welcome centres.

In spite of the increased numbers of newcomers from 2015 to 2017, settlement funds were cut. In 2017 the ELL Consortium lobbied the federal government to not only eliminate the cuts but to increase the funding. The funding was not cut, but it was not increased. This meant doing more with less.

The pie charts on the next slide graphically illustrate the concerns we have about the numbers of IRCC-ineligible individuals who are receiving services from the five school districts pictured. These just a sampling of impacted school districts. The ineligible numbers have been steadily increasing over the years, to the point that they outnumber the eligible newcomers in many districts. As you can imagine, staff and resources are stretched to provide these services, often off the side of their desks. Our mandate is to support and educate students in our schools, but their families need support, too, if their children are to succeed.

I'd like to leave you with the image of the two students in a classroom whose families have similar settlement needs, but who actually receive different levels of service. If you had to choose between giving more support to one student and their family over the other, could you do it? This is a choice some school districts in B.C. are being forced to make.

The ELL Consortium urges the government to allow for inclusion of all those needing settlement support, regardless of their immigration status, and to not only increase funding but to allow for more flexibility in its use so we can meet the needs of a changing newcomer population. Why? Because it's the right thing to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the Toronto District School Board, with Mr. Green and Ms. Germanakos.

Mr. Garry Green (Senior Manager, Business Development and Community Services, Toronto District School Board): Thank

you so much for having us here and for the opportunity to speak to the committee. I'm also very happy to have the opportunity to meet some colleagues from British Columbia and to learn more about what is going on there.

I am the senior manager of business development and community services, as well as student transportation, for the Toronto District School Board.

My colleague here, Toulia Germanakos, is the program coordinator with the language instruction for newcomers to Canada program.

TDSB has operated LINC through its legacy board since 1992. Since 2009, TDSB has also operated a suite of other programs including newcomer services, welcoming communities and enhanced language training, among others. The board, through its continuing education department, also offers provincially funded ESL programming.

I noticed from the previous slides that the funding is done differently, provincially, between Ontario and British Columbia, which is some of the challenge there.

TDSB recognizes the importance of strong and healthy communities and supporting the social and economic development of our neighbourhoods and our city. The LINC program and other settlement services have played a vital role in this development. We are proud of the work that our team has done in assisting the integration and settlement of landed immigrants and refugees and supporting them on their path to citizenship.

Our LINC program operates out of 13 locations and serves approximately 5,000 learners per year who speak over 40 different languages. At any given time, up to 250 "care for newcomer children" attend our childminding supports.

TDSB LINC stays current with demand by providing service in areas where the largest population of newcomers resides. This sometimes moves over time. Some of our schools are facing a large influx of students. Local hotels have the students and then we're bussing them to the local schools, so at any given time a school that had only 200 or 250 students now has 70 or 100 more students. You can imagine how this could be changing the entire dynamics of the community. The principals sometimes are single administrators, so at that particular location they are scrambling to try to meet needs. Having additional programming that is "just in time" can assist with that. We don't quite have that, but we are trying to make do as best as we can.

An attempt is made with our TDSB LINC programs to move as demand increases. We try to have locations that are large and have multiple services and conveniences nearby. Our Centrepoint LINC program, for example, is located in a mall bordering Toronto and York Region, with convenient access to bus and subway. The helpful childminding program allows newcomers to ensure that all the immediate needs are cared for and they can focus on their language instruction.

As a best practice, we have also co-located with the enhanced language training program for when learners move on from the program and are seeking employment, as well with as Francophone service providers in the area, such as Collège Boréal and Centre francophone. This also allows the learner to complete their learning from beginning levels to completion all under one roof. From a pedagogical standpoint, being able to share with colleagues at different levels and share best practices for learning has also been very helpful.

Some best practices that our program employs include working in consultation with the assessment centre to identify service provider gaps in the city through environmental scans, employing only trained instructors certified in teaching English as a second language and portfolio-based learning assessment—you may hear us refer to that as PBLA—and ensuring that all learners sign contracts available in their preferred language outlining the class schedule, term end dates and expectations. Modules are developed using the LINC curriculum guidelines and aligned with Canadian language benchmarks as well as the settlement needs of learners, as determined by conducting needs assessments in the classroom. As mentioned by my colleague, task-based assessments and activities are aligned to PBLA using real-world goals.

The assessment is evidence-based and transparent, so it's not just the instructor's judgment of how the person is doing. That has been a great enhancement to the program. It is based on evidence or artifacts collected in the learner's portfolio.

All of this is to ensure that there is a learner-centred approach. Every effort is made to ensure that all learning styles are accommodated. Continuous feedback is provided through one-on-one conferencing with the learner at the end of each term.

•(1625)

We find it's very important to enforce an attendance policy. We don't want people coming and going with great regularity. We want to help guide them through their entire learning journey. If they're away, they're expected to call in. Again, if they're taking a spot that could otherwise be used by somebody else, we do have wait-lists at our sites, so we manage that closely. Our wait-lists are managed and updated weekly at all sites, and at larger sites, such as the Centerpoint one or Albion mall, it is managed on a daily basis to ensure it is current and learners are accommodated as quickly as possible.

Quarterly meetings are held with other service providers in the city of Toronto to collaborate and consult with one another.

As to blended learning, all TDSB LINC sites have computer labs. This is very important. This allows learners to go at their own pace and access various computer assisted language learning software.

Many instructors also use EduLINC, and this allows learners to stay current who have missed class due to illness or caring for a family member. These digital literacy skills also assist learners to enter into the workforce.

Every site has a visible program charter that is offered in 17 languages, including both official languages, and this outlines our customer service expectations. It also provides an email and phone number where they can provide feedback. We value the input of every single one of our learners. We want to make sure they have ready access to let us know what we could do better.

A variety of class schedules are offered: full-time, part-time and evening. Learners with disabilities are welcomed and accommodated.

It's very important that we keep current with learning opportunities for our staff, so all staff attend professional development annually, and all TDSB staff complete mandatory training, such as AODA, anaphylaxis and others, and those are offered in kind through the Toronto board.

PBLA leads ensure—

•(1630)

The Chair: I need you to come to a close quickly.

Mr. Garry Green: Okay. Thank you.

I'll just close by saying that some of the challenges we're currently facing are around funding. It has remained static while costs have gone up significantly over time. Another is the coordination between different levels of government and the programming—ESL and LINC as examples.

Thank you.

The Chair: That may be the most important part of your presentation for the committee. If you would like to submit something in writing, that would be helpful—

Mr. Garry Green: Absolutely.

The Chair: —because the other part is narrative that we already have.

I'm going to suggest that we have a four-minute round. I'm trying to do the math here. We'll have four folks with four minutes each.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I'll try to be quick, but I want to say thank you. My family has received services from three of four of the presenters here. My mother came in 1957 and took ESL at John Oliver Secondary School in Vancouver. I grew up in Burnaby and went to elementary and high school there—Windsor Elementary and then Burnaby South Secondary—and saw a lot of my friends take it. Fortunately, I didn't have to, but they came out amazing individuals. Some of them are owners of large conglomerates, large corporations or small and medium-sized businesses, and have done amazing things in life because of the English language training they got at such a young age.

Maybe if I can go to Ms. Windsor, in Surrey we had this issue about the welcome centre in the first year, where the cut-off for funding from the previous was ending in March, and I understand it's a unionized environment so you had to give a certain period of notice, before we intervened. We were fortunate enough to give them bridge funding in between. I'm just wondering. Is the new model now, where you can apply for funding for up to five years, better and much easier for planning, leasing, hiring and retention, aside from that March 31 date versus the school year end date?

Ms. Val Windsor: I'm going to turn that over to Heather Hart, who is an assistant superintendent in Burnaby. She has the details on that.

Ms. Heather Hart: My answer is yes and no, because I believe we are hearing that there will be some modifications to the five-year funding model but not significant changes that we're expecting. We have heard that we'll be able to retain some of the slippage that has been before being taken back. We've also heard that the reporting requirements will be a little bit different, but we're waiting to find out about significant changes around this.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay.

My second question—and I think Ms. Windsor or Ms. Hart can answer—is that in the graphs we saw, they showed IRCC eligible versus IRCC not eligible.

What is the quick definition of eligible versus not eligible?

•(1635)

Ms. Val Windsor: I will go back to the slides, and there it is.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Naturalized citizens after they have been....

I see. Okay.

Ms. Val Windsor: Yes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What is the backlog in LINC classes in Burnaby, and can you also give me the numbers for Surrey as well?

Are you seeing any backlog or wait-list times, and if so, how long is the wait-list in general?

Ms. Heather Hart: There are significant wait-lists. I'm not able to give you an exact number on that for both the childminding piece and the inclusion in instruction.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So it's both for the childminding piece and the others.

Ms. Heather Hart: Yes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What percentage of your students require childminding?

Ms. Heather Hart: I would say it's a significant number of them. Most of them are also parents of students in our K to 12 system that are receiving the LINC instruction.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So they are in high school and they also have children at a young age. Is that what you're saying? Or are they adults who are going back to high school to complete it?

Ms. Heather Hart: The LINC is providing the language training for the parents.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Yes.

Ms. Heather Hart: The other ones have students in the K to 12 system.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay. I got you.

If the students are in school at the time, is it that they cannot attend the classes during the day and therefore need childminding? They have to do them after school hours?

Ms. Heather Hart: I think the childminding offers them the ability to attend during the day and someone is minding their children.

Am I confusing the question?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I can ask it off the record. What I was trying to see is—

Ms. Heather Hart: Is it pre-school that you're talking about?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Yes.

You said some of them are in K to 12. I'm saying that if the child is in K to 12, then they don't require childminding.

Ms. Heather Hart: They are in school. Right.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What I want to know is how many of the adults requesting LINC training require childminding while they are taking classes?

Ms. Heather Hart: I would say that it's 80% or more.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It's 80%.

Okay, so—

The Chair: Mr. Tilson, for four minutes, please.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Green, with the Toronto District School Board, you talked about problems with busing and problems with funding.

Can you tell us whether the influx of illegal asylum seekers has affected the Toronto District School Board?

Mr. Garry Green: I can speak about the LINC programming. If a person is illegal, they wouldn't qualify for the programming. They would be handled by the provincial funding, which is held by another department.

Our department oversees the federally funded language instruction for newcomers to Canada.

Mr. David Tilson: So the federal government doesn't provide funding for language.

Mr. Garry Green: They provide it for language for those who are eligible, so convention refugees and landed immigrants.

Mr. David Tilson: The illegal asylum seekers are not eligible.

Mr. Garry Green: Correct.

Mr. David Tilson: Can you elaborate on funding for the Toronto District School Board for language training and anything else?

You threw in busing. Maybe you can talk about that, not with respect to the province but to the federal government.

Mr. Garry Green: I can speak to the most recent three contracts for the federal government. They have been at the same level for each of the three years. However, if you look at rental costs as an example, our rental costs have gone up in the neighbourhood of between 10% to 20%. Our staffing costs have gone up by about 8% to 12% over that same period of time.

As we look at 13 sites, about a few hundred staff, the 5,000 learners per year, it's quite a significant operation. As these costs escalate, we need to find ways to continue to be more efficient in terms of how we provide the operations.

Something we have done is to increase consolidation of locations. We were at over 20 sites; we have gone down to 13 sites. We've been able to harmonize some costs that way. We've reduced some supervisory costs as a result because we have fewer locations for physical plant to oversee.

We continue to try to innovate and find ways to do more with the existing finances, but, of course, that is an ongoing challenge.

Mr. David Tilson: Are you able to tell us how much you're short, if we could talk in those terms? That might be difficult, but we could try.

• (1640)

Mr. Garry Green: For the coming year, for example, we're going to be closing one location. Had we another million dollars, we'd be able to keep that going.

Mr. David Tilson: So if you were to—

Mr. Garry Green: Or \$604,000.

Mr. David Tilson: So if you were to approach the federal government to ask for funding for the programs you're providing for all of these services, you're short somewhere between \$600,000 and \$700,000 a year?

Mr. Garry Green: Yes.

Mr. David Tilson: Is that fair?

Mr. Garry Green: That's correct, yes.

Mr. David Tilson: Have you made representations to the...I don't know who does this...the Department of Immigration?

Mr. Garry Green: We usually work through our local office, so we will express to them the importance of this. Yet, at the same time, some of the measures that we take, if we can be more efficient with something, we've been more efficient. If there's a position we can leave unfilled, we leave it unfilled. However, you do get to a point where it gets increasingly more difficult. I think over the next three years, that's where we'll probably be feeling it most.

Mr. David Tilson: When was the last time you had an increase in funding?

Mr. Garry Green: I can't tell you exactly, but it's been awhile.

Mr. David Tilson: Long ago.

Do you have any comments on those questions I've been asking, Ms. Hart?

Ms. Heather Hart: The great question is about the increase in funding, because of the way it's designed. It looks like we're receiving some increases in funding. We receive a base amount and then there's an amendment given, but it takes a whole process of time for this amendment to go through. We might receive word that it's going through in November, and it actually comes at the end of January. You hire somebody, and you have to spend that by the end of March. If you don't spend it by the end of March, then that slippage is pulled back again.

Mr. David Tilson: Is that provincial or federal?

Ms. Heather Hart: This is federal.

The Chair: I need to end you there.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

I want to build on that because I think that is one of the critical issues. It sounds like it's happening in the lower mainland, as well as in Toronto and elsewhere.

You have a larger population for which you are not funded well enough to provide the supports you need. With the increase in students who require support, and without a corresponding funding increase, you have to do more with less, right? Do I have that right?

Mr. Garry Green: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On the second issue, the government will sometimes come in with what's called "slippage money" or "amendments," where, at the end of their fiscal cycle, they have some money they've found somewhere. All of a sudden they come to you and say, "Hey, here's some money," and then you have a very limited time to spend it. Therefore you don't have access to stable funding. You never know when that money is coming, and in a unionized environment you need to prepare to see what staff need to be hired and to plan accordingly. That's another significant problem to which you are seeking resolution.

There's also the issue around the misaligned calendar of a school year versus that of the budget cycle. That, too, needs to be aligned so you can do your work properly. That's the third thing.

The last thing I want to ask you about is what happens to the students when they don't get the support they need. I wonder, Ms. Reddy, if you can highlight that for me. What are the consequences of that?

Ms. Jennifer Reddy (School Trustee, British Columbia School Trustees Association, Vancouver School Board): I have a testimonial from a young person in Vancouver who delineates the experience. I think one of the key points about this is that the school board is actually the first and most frequent point of contact for the students. Through the students we meet the parents and other siblings, so that kids can focus on learning and the parents can focus on their settlement and learning through LINC. In that time frame, it's also very limited until they turn 19 and age out of the system, so we have a small window in which we can provide the support they need.

This is from Myriam, and this is her story:

Today I am an honors political science student at McGill University and now the recipient of two major scholarships that allows me to study in France for one year to learn about European politics and excel my French. If VSB staff followed the discriminatory protocol and deprived me of the crucial services I received, I do not know where I would be today.

When I came to Canada I did not speak English, lacked prior formal education, and my family and I suffered from the trauma of migration and family separation. These were some of the issues amongst many others that we were facing in our new country.

However, at VSB with the supports I received from EIYP (Engaged Immigrant Youth Program/SWIS) with my day to day needs such as understanding school system—

The Chair: Could I get you to slow down a little bit for the interpreters. Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Reddy: Thank you. Yes, I do speak fast.

—feeling welcomed, making friends, getting involved, and receiving homework support. These programs empowered not just to learn English and excel academically but volunteer and start new programs in my community (English Welcome Club) in my city in order to empower other youth like myself.

However soon I learned that in fact, the support I was receiving was technically not for me because I was a refugee claimant therefore not qualified to receive these essential supports so crucial for my success. VSB staffs helped me regardless of caring about my status, and I am grateful for their courage because it took my family 3.5 years to receive a refugee status which meant I would get qualified for these support after leaving high school.

Myriam arrived in Canada as a refugee claimant and was very fortunate to make it to Canada alive, as many of people from her country of origin don't. The three and a half years it took to become a refugee was quite fast for immigration processing time.

Those are some examples of the differences between receiving settlement in that time frame and not.

• (1645)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: I'll give you an extra 30 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Green, very quickly, you were just saying that you are losing some funding. Can you just expand on that for me, please?

Mr. Garry Green: It's not a funding loss as much as the fact the costs have escalated and funding has remained at a static level.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In my last few seconds, because we are pushed for time, I'll just point out to all of our presenters that you can send additional material—

Mr. Garry Green: Sure.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —to the committee that would highlight some of the funding shortfall, which areas you need the government to pay attention to by way of action, whether it be funding or any other recommendations that would assist you in doing your jobs.

The Chair: Mr. Whalen, you have four minutes, not four and a half, like everyone else.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all, especially for the work your organizations do to help integrate newcomers and address some of their most pressing concerns.

On this side of the room, we've been under the impression from the data that we've increased the amount of money for settlement services agencies by 32% over the last four years, yet your organization is talking about flat funding and increased demands. Maybe you can elaborate a little on where you think this money is going and why you weren't seeing the 32% in your programs.

Mr. Garry Green: The Toronto District School Board is a large service provider in the city of Toronto, but is not the only service provider. There are a number of other program areas, including welcoming communities and newcomer services, so some of those programs have seen an increase. I think it would probably have to be looked at on a program-by-program basis, but certainly, as I've mentioned, the costs have escalated. I can give concrete numbers in the follow-up write-up that we can provide as well.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Windsor.

Ms. Jennifer Reddy: In the Vancouver situation, the funding comes for eligibles only. As an example, from April 2018 to January 2019, 60% of the intake in clients were ineligible, and the funding would only cover the 40% who were eligible.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Sure. On that note, you still provide the services to whom you are calling ineligibles. Are they receiving a lesser or a worse service?

Ms. Heather Hart: I think that our people are doing the best they can off the sides of their desks for those people. They are having to prioritize really drastic kinds of cases. They can't give them the same wraparound service and appropriate level of service they are giving others. I think that's what we're seeing. They deserve the same kind of service as eligible clients.

Mr. Nick Whalen: For the final question, we have been trying to be as respectful as we can of newcomers and of the language used in committee about their status.

Maybe, Mr. Green, you can confirm to us that the adjective “illegal” is not applied to the children who are in the school system in Toronto. The activity of their having crossed the border with their parents might have been illegal, but the children aren't being referred to as illegals within the context of the Toronto school board, I hope.

Mr. Garry Green: No, they are served, provided service and not discriminated in any way within the school board context.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If you were going to recommend additional services that you feel your cohort needs to be funded but that aren't currently funded, what would be the top two or three services these students need, which the general school population doesn't, that are dictated by their immigration status, both for eligibles and ineligibles? It would be nice to know whether these services need to be expanded in the school setting.

Mr. Garry Green: This gets into a little bit of a jurisdictional issue, but we do find a lot of students who need social work. If not that, then perhaps case management and support are needed to navigate through all of the different services while they're in school. There are settlement workers in school, but it's even a little more robust than that. There are some very significant trauma issues. There are some very significant service needs and mental health challenges and that sort of stuff, so I would say that would be there.

• (1650)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Everyone's nodding, and I've seen your little graphic with the puzzle pieces that show that navigation is a real issue.

Does the federal government have a role to play in helping coordinate this or is this something you look principally to the province to do?

Ms. Heather Hart: I'm not the one to answer that question. I think whoever makes those decisions makes the decisions. It's really about not who does it but the fact that someone has to step up to the plate here.

The Chair: Mr. DeCoursey—

Oh, go ahead.

Mr. Garry Green: This kind of piggybacks on what I had mentioned at the very end of my presentation, that the coordination between the province and the federal government is very important where there are different jurisdictional areas, because the learner or client does not really care who paid for the particular service; they just know that they need it. Gaps do arise when there's an absence of coordination.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): On the question of navigation, there's a local immigration partnership program funded by IRCC. Do your organizations connect with a local LIPS program and is that helping with the navigation of services and referral to services?

Ms. Jennifer Reddy: Yes, absolutely. In Vancouver's case, the local immigration partnership is really advantageous, especially in figuring out what kinds of services other organizations are doing to kind of bootstrap their way into it, such as colleges and universities.

Mr. Garry Green: From my perspective, that helps on a macro level in terms of coordination between the agencies. It doesn't always necessarily help on the micro level of the individual learner or client.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Germanakos.

Ms. Toula Germanakos (Program Coordinator, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, Toronto District School Board): We don't participate in the LIPS program, but we do have quarterly committee partnership meetings and we do get together with other service providers, and that's where we—

The Chair: I'm afraid I do need to cut you off, as we have another panel coming in. We may need a briefing on LIPS, because that sort of adds some confusion.

I need to move you out quickly. Thank you very much. We need to move our next panel in.

Please do respond to Ms. Kwan's request. The clerk will help you with that as well.

We'll suspend for one minute.

• (1650)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order. I am very worried about the looming votes.

Thank you to our witnesses. As I said, I'm a little worried that we are going to get cut off, so I want to get your testimony in first.

We're reconnecting with our video conference.

I think we'll begin with Ms. Foster, from the Arden Language Centre, for seven minutes.

Thank you.

Ms. Andy Foster (Project Coordinator, Arden Language Centre): Thank you very much.

I noticed her right away because she was wearing a head scarf, and in our small hockey town you didn't see that very often. I walked over and said hi.

Over the next few weeks, my husband and I started to talk with her and her husband, and we quickly found out that they knew very little English. Thankfully, both of us spoke Arabic, and so we started talking. In one of those conversations, we found out that in his old country, the husband had had a cellphone company, but now with limited English, he couldn't do much at all in Canada.

I explained that while we were waiting on a visa for ourselves to go back overseas, if they wanted, they could come to study with a new family that had just arrived at our church and who were sponsored. My husband was teaching them full time, five days a week.

Two months later, the 2015 elections happened and the promise of 25,000 refugees from Syria became a reality. Our small town, Owen Sound, became actively involved with helping different churches and different groups sponsor different families, because of what it had seen on television and because people were very heartbroken.

Soon our ESL centre went from four students to 40 overnight. We ran nine classes a day, five days a week, from 9:30 to 1. It was amazing to see how our volunteers came out of the woodwork. At the beginning, we had only a few, and by the end we had over 50 volunteers. Our plan was to run the program for just one year. We had thought that once their sponsorship was over they would then go on to bigger cities. We were wrong. Instead, our students wanted to study often and wanted to study more, and instead of their leaving, people from the larger cities started arriving in our small town.

We are now in our fourth year at Arden Language Centre, and it's been a privilege to serve our students.

How do we measure success? For us at Arden, it's not just about learning the language. For us, it's about their integrating. We want them to reach their dreams, whether it's to get their AZ driver's licence or to get their PSW certification at the local college.

What keeps them coming back each day? Number one for us is community. If you were to walk into the Arden Language Centre at 11 in the morning, you would smell food from Eritrea, Syria and different countries. Both the centre and the students provide food each day. We have found that food is an amazing tool for community.

We also have small class sizes. Our classes range from one student to eight students. Also, we want the involvement of our students' lives with our volunteers' lives, so we intentionally build community, whether that's going fishing, going for coffee or working out together at the Y.

Finally, we have amazing volunteers. Since we started, we've had over 19,000 volunteer hours contributed.

What are my recommendations for you from Arden Language Centre?

First, give rural Canadians the tools to help. Right now there's a lot of frustration because when newcomers come to the area, there are not any resettlement services, but having a mobile resettlement centre would really help a lot. This mobile centre could have a representative who would answer questions to sponsors, do ESL training seminars for those who want to volunteer, and do English testing for the students.

Second, give them more than a year to learn. If you can imagine moving to another country, having only one year to learn a new language, and then having the jobs that you have right now, it would be impossible, but that's what we expect from our refugees and newcomers when they arrive in Canada. This needs to change.

Third, make bursaries available for newcomers. Before we started the Arden Language Centre, it was an almost a two-hour drive to the closest ESL centre. One issue is that often faith-based organizations want to get involved but do not have the funding to do this, and they are afraid to take government funding. As a case in point, in 2017, we ran an ESL summer camp. That summer we applied for the summer student program and got the funding with no problems. The following year, in 2018, because of the attestation on abortion that had been added, we could not sign for getting that funding. Suddenly we had over 100 of our newcomers without ESL, so having a

program where ESL students apply directly to the government to get bursaries to continue their studies would be a really big help.

• (1655)

Before my time is up, I want to share some more about the couple I mentioned at the beginning. The wife, coming in with a grade 5 education, is now in her upper intermediate class. She's assisting me in teaching the citizenship class, as she just passed her test herself. Her husband is also waiting to be sworn in as a citizen. Next week, on April 13, he will open his own cellphone and computer repair shop in Owen Sound.

This is just one example of the many newcomers in our small town. For the past three years, we have had the privilege of seeing many newcomers' lives be impacted and rebuilt by the support of rural Canadians. Rural communities want to help and they need your support. Newcomers need the time and finances so that programs like Arden Language Centre can continue to help integrate newcomers to Canada.

Thank you for the opportunity.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, and good luck with your run.

We'll go to the International English Language Testing System, to Ms. Dienhoff and Ms. Sellar.

Ms. Kim Dienhoff (Commercial Director, IDP Education Ltd., International English Language Testing System): Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the three partners of the international English-language testing system, more commonly referred to as IELTS, I'd like to first take the opportunity to thank you for the invitation to appear today as the committee continues to undertake this important study on settlement services across Canada.

My name is Kim Dienhoff, and I am the commercial director at IDP Education Ltd., based in Melbourne, Australia. I am joined today by Victoria Sellar, assistant director, partnership and policy, at Cambridge Assessment English in the U.K.

IDP and Cambridge Assessment English make up two of the three partners that own the IELTS test. Our third partner is the British Council. IDP and the British Council largely focus on test delivery, while Cambridge is responsible for test production, development, research and analysis. In all, between the three partners, there is an extensive collective experience in language testing and delivery internationally.

By way of background for the committee, since launching in 1989, the IELTS test has largely been recognized as the most secure, accessible, high-stakes English-language test around the world. Currently, the test is accepted as proof of language proficiency by over 10,000 institutions and organizations globally, including over 450 in Canada, most notably universities, professional associations and government immigration authorities. There are currently two versions of the test, general training and academic. The former is used largely for migration purposes, while the academic version is used most often by higher education and professional associations as proof of English proficiency. The test is broken into the four basic components of English assessment: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

For over 15 years, first on an interim basis and then in 2014 on a full designation basis, the IELTS test has been recognized by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as proof of English-language proficiency for express entry, Quebec-selected skilled workers, and provincial nominee programs. In total, since 2003, over two and a half million IELTS tests have been delivered in Canada. We remain one of only two language tests currently accepted by IRCC. Over the course of our partnership with the Government of Canada, the IELTS partnership has enjoyed a strong, collaborative working relationship with IRCC. We greatly value our shared goal of providing a service that truly works well for all involved.

I'll hand it over to Victoria.

Ms. Victoria Sellar (Assistant Director, Partnerships and Policy, Cambridge Language Assessment, International English Language Testing System): In terms of the mandate for this particular study and to give the committee a better idea as to the supply and demand for the IELTS test, over the last 12 months there have 3.5 million tests taken globally via one of our over 1,600 test-taking locations. Specific to Canada, 163,000 tests were taken within the country in the last 12 months at one of our 200 plus locations across the country. Simply put, the demand and trust for the IELTS test in Canada and around the world are evident.

To respond to this demand and plans for future capacity, IELTS has always made a concerted effort to consistently innovate to ensure better service delivery and client support. As a recent example, in late 2018, Canada became one of 47 countries to benefit from the global rollout of computer-delivered IELTS. There are currently six computer-delivered locations in Canada, and this number can and will grow based on supply and demand.

Computer-delivered IELTS is also available in nine out of the top 10 Canada-bound countries, with the U.S. set to launch soon. Using computer-delivered IELTS now means that the test is available seven days a week, up to three times a day. Moreover, new test centres can be set up in eight to 10 weeks to respond to any capacity constraints. Computer-delivered IELTS is but one of the many examples of investment by the partnership to provide better service delivery and respond to demand.

Finally, it should be noted that test-takers still have a choice of taking a paper-based test, which we have found to still be the preferred and most in-demand choice in Canada and globally. Paper-based tests expand accessibility, as it means that even in low-tech remote locations a secure test can be delivered.

The mandate of this study also seeks to understand the “criteria for measuring success” of a service. The IELTS partnership measures our success by ensuring a secure, accurate, fully accessible test that ultimately allows for the successful integration of individuals into Canadian society. At the end of the day, this is one large and important component of successful settlement in Canada.

In this regard, we must underscore that the IELTS test is a high-stakes test that underwent a rigorous accreditation process with the Government of Canada. We are extremely proud of our record, both inside and outside of Canada, in terms of setting globally accepted and understood standards, with no major incidents to report.

This point takes us to our one recommendation for the committee. Should any future tests be considered for recognition by the Government of Canada, we stress that they be put through this same extensive accreditation process and be based on evidence-based decision-making based on the need or demand for that test. Examples from other countries where additional tests have been introduced by governments show that they have in many cases resulted in unintended policy consequences, especially in terms of equivalencies and/or comparability of the tests. Specifically, there has been a lack of differentiation in test results in writing and at the high end of speaking. This ultimately impacts the number of points awarded under a system such as express entry here in Canada.

At the end of the day, tests such as IELTS play a large role and service in ensuring successful settlement. We would be happy to elaborate more on this during questions.

In closing, we thank the committee once again for the invitation to appear today. We look forward to our continued relationship with the Government of Canada and to answering any questions you may have.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We will now give the floor to Mr. Belhocine, from the Maison internationale de la Rive-Sud, in Montreal.

Welcome, Mr. Belhocine. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Nouredine Belhocine (General Manager, Maison Internationale de la Rive-Sud): Am I the one who has the floor?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nouredine Belhocine: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

First, I want to thank you for inviting me to testify before your committee. I received the memo outlining the topics for our intervention. I know we have a seven-minute limit. It will be difficult but I will do my best.

The Maison internationale de la Rive-Sud is a community organization that has been working in the immigration field for 44 years. We are located in Brossard, a town on the south shore of Montreal where there is great ethnic diversity. In Brossard, there are more than 50 different cultural origins, if not more. This is a very multiethnic city. The organization has existed for about 44 years and has 30 permanent employees. This concludes my outline of the organization.

I was asked to broach the following points: the range of services we provide, exemplary practices, the criteria by which success is measured, and the information collected on service supply and demand. Finally, I will say a few words on the services provided outside of Canada to the persons who have not yet got here, the immigration applicants.

As for the range of services provided by the organization, there are the services for which there is public funding, and those for which there is none, that is to say the self-funded services. The Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion (MIDI) program, Réussir l'intégration, or PRint, is the most important of these. Then there are the francization programs for immigrants. Those are the two most important MIDI programs which we administer.

We also offer a range of services, funded, among others, by Emploi-Québec in the case of employability programs, and by the federal government in the case of services for young immigrant professionals of less than 30 years of age who want to integrate the labour force.

We also manage a multitude of projects and activities with various partners, such as the youth centres. Ours is the Centre jeunesse de la Montérégie. There is also a health clinic for refugees, the Clinique santé des réfugiés, where we offer a complete health check-up to the refugees who are taken on by the government when they arrive. We also have a pool of regional interpreters we manage internally. Those are, in the main, the services we offer thanks to public funding.

As for the services without public funding, we opened a coffee shop for senior immigrants. This service for the elderly, which did not exist before, has received very little public funding. It is basically funded by our organization. We also have a day care service and family vacation projects for newcomers in Quebec summer camps. We also offer language classes in English, Spanish or Italian, occasionally. We provide free help with income tax returns to newcomers and we distribute some food, particularly to vulnerable older people who come to our elders' Café des aînés.

As for exemplary practices, I noted four of five. I will go over them very quickly. First there is the continuous enrichment of our service offer. In other words, our service offer is not set in stone, which means that it evolves according to the groups of immigrants who arrive. We are also very flexible and the accessibility of our services is appreciated. That flexibility involves schedules, places, types of intervention and so on. Moreover, we have a frontline multiethnic team which can help the newcomers with linguistic

issues. Internally, we speak about 15 languages, that is to say the main languages. In general, that is sufficient, but we can call on interpreters when we need them. We are also concerned with continually adapting our services.

• (1710)

In other words, there is no standardized procedure that would force interveners to act in a way that might not be the right call. We give our frontline, settlement and integration teams the freedom to adapt the services as needed.

In addition, one of the features of our exemplary practices is the continuum of services. There is a continuum of services. In other words, we want the newcomers to find just about everything they need in the same place. If we are missing something, we establish partnerships with local resources to ensure that the immigrant does not draw a blank. Those are the exemplary practices.

As for the criteria to measure success, generally, as you know, there are accountability measures included in the agreements with the funding entities. There are programs, projects and calls for projects, and most of the funders, if not all, require accountability that predefines the criteria for success or failure, that is to say the indicators that allow one to measure results. We respect that, naturally. As for the activities that are not funded, we take inspiration from those models or we develop our own results assessment indicators to ensure that we are headed in the right direction.

As for the information we collect on supply and demand, we listen to the clientele. We also listen to our partners. Project ideas or the identification of needs may also come from our partners. Funding bodies may also make suggestions in the form of calls for projects. Of course, when there is a call for projects, this means that a need has been defined. And finally, we may consult studies and academic research.

I have a few last words to conclude, and then I'll entertain your questions, naturally. I was asked to speak about online services outside Canada, before people arrive here. As an organization, we do not have to put in place external services, except for our website, of course, which allows people abroad to make appointments with us and arrange for temporary housing if they need it. That is about the extent of what we offer outside of Canada.

However, the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion put in place an electronic platform for online services, so they exist—

• (1715)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Belhocine, but we have to stop here so that we have a few minutes left for questions and answers.

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll begin our first round of questions.

Mr. Ayoub, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I'm still going to ask the question in French. You can answer in English, no problem.

[Translation]

Ms. Foster, first I must congratulate you for all of the work you do on integration. You try to integrate the newcomers by teaching them English, especially, in your area.

At one point you referred to Canada Summer Jobs. I'd like to know if you submitted a request to Canada Summer Jobs before 2015. You submitted an application every year but one, because of the abortion issue; that was the main reason your application was rejected.

If I may, I'd like to ask you what the link is between learning English and abortion.

[English]

Ms. Andy Foster: Thank you for your question.

Yes, in 2017 we applied and had no problems. Then in 2018, because as Christians we couldn't sign the attestation for our church, because we couldn't agree with that. It was frustrating for us as well, because our newcomers actually had the same moral view as we had. For us I guess it would be the same question: What does ESL have to do with abortion? We felt like ethics should have been kept out of the funding.... That's what we thought.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Belhocine, thank you for your testimony and the information you have provided.

I only have four minutes, so I'll get straight to the point.

I have in hand a document you produced in the summer of 2018. It is very well done. The last report of the Auditor General referred to the failure of francization. Have things changed since? What is the situation with respect to the francization of newcomers, particularly in Quebec, and of employability in the regions?

My questions are quite broad and I only have a minute and a half left.

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: Very well.

We read the report of the Auditor General, of course. As an organization and as a group of integration organizations in Quebec, we share her point of view. There are a lot of issues but also a lot of things that are well done. There are a lot of weak points in the administration of francization programs, notably the fact that it is rigid.

There is also an underfunding and underinvestment issue with respect to francization programs which, in my opinion, would first of all require a modernization of tools. This is 2019, but the teaching method is still the one where you have a teacher up front, students in the class, and a blackboard. These learners come from linguistic universes that are very far removed from that of French. That sometimes requires particular skills from teachers and modern teaching tools.

I believe I know—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: May I interrupt you?

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: Yes.

• (1720)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: On francization, how long should it take for someone to be able to function in this language and occupy a job?

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: My reply will be nuanced.

The newcomers already have varied schooling levels in their original languages. If someone never went to school in his country of origin, it will take a long time before he learns the rudiments of the language and is functional in the new one. However, someone who holds a doctorate from China and has never learned French will learn it quickly if he is in a full-time course. Unfortunately, it's not always possible because the newcomers also have to earn a living while they do this.

Our organization offers evening courses, but that it still part-time, and the means are not adapted. That is the heart of the issue. We have to modernize language learning.

The Chair: I must interrupt you.

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: Very well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Belhocine.

[English]

I don't usually ask questions, but I want to ask this of Ms. Foster. With the change in the attestation this year, have you applied to the Canada summer jobs program for this year's funding?

Ms. Andy Foster: We actually are staying away from the government funding, because of the fear of what's going to happen next year. We have found other ways to get our funding.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: To Mr. Belhocine, and then to Ms. Dienhoff if we have time, my question is this.

There are people who have come to this country seeking asylum who lack basic education or, indeed, have problems with literacy skills, or there may be other reasons. These people have had a harder time learning French or learning English and, hence, had a more difficult path to Canadian citizenship.

Has this been your experience and do you have suggestions to improve the results in this category?

Mr. Belhocine.

[Translation]

Mr. Noureddine Belhocine: Thank you for the question.

About a year ago, the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion finally agreed, after we exerted pressure, to admit asylum seekers into its part-time French courses. They only let them in about a year ago, so it hasn't been long. Before that, they were not entitled to French classes.

I believe the asylum-seeking process or the request for refugee status is under federal jurisdiction. I think it would be good for the federal government to think about a formula to provide language learning services, in either French or English, or both ideally, to that clientele, because they are going to continue to have these admission problems at the provincial level.

Every year, we try to obtain something for the asylum seekers but we get nowhere. The provincial government refuses, alleging that these persons are not entitled to these courses since they may not stay in Canada, and also because it's a matter of federal jurisdiction, and so on.

I believe there are no programs at all.

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you, sir.

Ms. Dienhoff, have you had this experience, and if you have, do you have recommendations as to what this committee could tell Parliament?

Ms. Kim Dienhoff: IELTS is a testing organization, as opposed to a language learning organization. We don't have direct experience in this space, but I think this is a common problem in the English-speaking countries that we work with, such as Australia, the U.K., New Zealand and Canada.

I think each country does something a bit different in the types of programs they offer people. There has been a lot of debate globally about the accepted level of language skills of people who come as refugees. I think it's a common problem that they do struggle to meet the requirements.

I think Canada has a relatively welcoming level 4. I think New Zealand has a slightly lower requirement, but everybody else's requirement is the same as or higher than Canada's.

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Foster, if MP Miller knew you were here, he would be here.

My question may not apply to you. It may be more of an urban type of question, but perhaps you could comment.

Are there particular challenges in language training or other services for those people who have been victims of genocide or other violent atrocities?

I'm thinking particularly of Yazidi women and girls. We've heard evidence that this group in particular has experienced difficulties in adjusting in their time here.

• (1725)

Ms. Andy Foster: Yes, definitely PTSD and other problems from their coming from backgrounds like that have caused problems. It's hard to focus on studying English when you have no way to get help with that first.

Yes. We've definitely had that experience where it's hard for students to focus, and a lot of other issues come out. English is almost the least of their worries at that point.

Mr. David Tilson: I don't know if you've put your mind to this, but do you have any recommendations to the committee on how the federal government should deal with this?

Ms. Andy Foster: Absolutely. Having more programs available for people when they come, letting them know they have psychotherapists and the like whom they can go to for the first year—in smaller towns, people often don't even know that's available for them—and translators and interpreters, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

You did make up the time, by the way.

Mr. David Tilson: You're a good man, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I made sure of it.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses as well.

I'd like to first ask about the language assessment piece, if I may, Ms. Dienhoff and Ms. Sellar. One of the issues I often hear from our temporary foreign workers is that caregivers must have a grade 12 equivalency from their home country to successfully make an application. Often, for some reason, that equivalency is not met. It's very difficult for them to achieve that, and then of course they have to have language testing as well and they have to achieve level 5. That is also very difficult for them.

Often the tests are administered in such a way that the writing, the speaking, the reading, etc., are combined, as opposed to separate pieces. It could be that a person could do well in three of the categories, but not in the writing part, let's say, but they can't take these tests separately.

I wonder if you can comment on that and see whether there's a way to assist these individuals so they have a better opportunity to pass these language testing requirements.

Ms. Kim Dienhoff: I think IELTS does offer the speaking test as a separate test from the other three components. I think that's helpful, and it's often done in a private one-on-one situation, which is great for the test taker, particularly if the person is struggling a little, because the examiner can help to make them feel comfortable and draw out a better response from them.

I think the other components of the test often depend on the way the test has been constructed. Each part of the IELTS test is...we're only looking at that part, even though when you're doing a speaking test you're also listening. For example, we're only assessing the speaking in that component.

We've certainly thought about being able to do that. Of course, it would require the government to recognize that type of thing. We'd be happy to put that on the table.

I think another alternative, particularly when you're looking at people who are coming in perhaps on family visas and in the types of situations where they're not going to be working in a professional environment, then we do also have a level 2 skills test, which would simply be a 20-minute speaking and listening type of test. That is currently used in the U.K., and I think that the governments I talk of around the world are starting to move toward this a little more, as a better option for those who don't require the high-level professional skills.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would love it if you would share with our committee any additional information that you can on separating out the different test components and on how the government can look at doing that in the assessments.

I'm an ESL kid. I come from an immigrant family. I have to tell you that for working parents who are trying to put food on the table and trying to get their language upgrades to a certain level, it is very onerous. It's very, very onerous. So the easier we can make it, I think, the faster they will succeed. My parents succeeded here in Canada, but I know a lot of newcomers today who are still struggling with that.

I would welcome any information that you may have for us to make that process easier for newcomers.

• (1730)

Ms. Kim Dienhoff: Thank you. We would be happy to provide that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Ms. Foster, on the question of supporting newcomers for resettlement and particularly in rural communities,

we've heard from other witnesses in different settings that what we really require is some infrastructure in the community to provide those kinds of welcoming opportunities for newcomers in rural communities.

What are some of the specific things you think the government can do to support communities such as yours to welcome newcomers and help them resettle?

Ms. Andy Foster: I think having a representative come every second month or so so that people from the whole area could come to ask questions and volunteers who are teaching ESL and that type of thing could get a little bit of training would really help. They feel pretty left out, I would say. I think they get discouraged. If there were a little something from the government side out there, I think you would get more people wanting to resettle.

The Chair: I just need to interrupt, as you've come to the end of your five minutes.

I need unanimous consent to continue. We could do one or two more, but it's up to you.

Mr. David Tilson: No.

The Chair: Okay.

We're going to adjourn the meeting now.

Thank you, witnesses. If you have anything else you would like to submit to our committee, you are invited to do so in writing. If you want any advice, the clerk can help you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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