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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I have quorum, and I'm going to call this meeting to order.

This is the 155th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're continuing our study of settlement services across Canada. We have two panels today. Just as a reminder to the committee, this will be our last meeting with witnesses on this study, so ask your best questions. I would like to reserve five or 10 minutes at the end of the meeting to go over the schedule for the next week, so you'll have an idea of what the committee meeting times will be.

We welcome, from COSTI Immigrant Services, Mr. Mario Calla, executive director, and from Four County Labour Market Planning Board, Gemma Mendez-Smith, executive director.

Mr. Calla, you have seven minutes to make your opening remarks.

Mr. Mario Calla (Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services): Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant.

Good afternoon, and thank you for the invitation to speak to you today.

My name is Mario Calla, and I am the executive director of COSTI Immigrant Services.

COSTI is an immigrant settlement charitable organization serving newcomers in the greater Toronto area. COSTI was founded in 1952 by the Italian community to help settle newly arrived immigrants. Today, it is a multiservice organization providing settlement counselling, English language training, employment, housing and mental health services to approximately 40,000 newcomers per year in over 60 different languages.

As your committee studies what works and what needs improvement in settlement services, it is important to acknowledge that Canada represents the international gold standard for how it receives and integrates newcomers. Every year, COSTI receives numerous delegations from other countries who come here to study Canada's success in settling immigrants and refugees. Immigration works well for Canada. In Toronto, this success is largely driven by a coordinated set of services by all three orders of government.

For my first comment, I would like to focus on the importance of intergovernmental co-operation on the successful integration of newcomers.

During the Syrian refugee initiative, COSTI was responsible for resettling the largest cohort of government-assisted refugees in the country: 2,200 in 2016. We would not have succeeded in this task without the co-operation of all three orders of government. Planning and coordinating tables were established where service providers in all three orders of government set priorities and activated services. The municipality had their children's services department set up programs in hotels, and their public health department had a mobile dental clinic make the rounds at these temporary sites. Meanwhile, the province had the school boards bus the children to local schools, and health clinics were established in the temporary sites.

This kind of coordination was critical, and in many respects continues today. The federal government and the Province of Ontario co-fund the orientation to Ontario initiative, the purpose of which is to establish a standard of orientation services for settlement agencies. The province also takes a balanced approach to settlement services by funding services for newcomers who are ineligible for federal programs.

It is concerning, however, that we are not seeing this same level of co-operation in addressing the numbers of refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system. In our work with refugee claimants, it is clear that some are willing to travel to other destinations in Ontario in search of jobs and affordable housing. However, once they arrive in Toronto, they start to get established and it makes it more difficult to move.

What is required is a service in Lacolle, Quebec, or a reception centre in Ontario, where the new arrivals can be informed about various settlement options available to them outside of Toronto. This would ease the stress on Toronto's shelter system while providing potential labour market talent to cities that have been trying to fill workforce positions.

My first recommendation is to implement a triage system for refugee claimants crossing at the Quebec border to provide them with information about the profile and benefits of various destinations outside of the greater Toronto area to divert them to destinations where they can get established more quickly.

The other item I would like to table with you is what we at COSTI have learned about the ingredients for successful employment programs for newcomers. The unemployment rate for working-age immigrants in 2017 dropped to 6.4% compared to 5% for the Canadian born. While this is an encouraging trend, we need to continue to move that unemployment rate down by assisting newcomers in becoming productive citizens.

We have found that the employment programs with the greatest success for newcomers have two characteristics. The first is that these programs specialize by focusing on the specific needs of newcomers. This specialization includes providing Canadian context, such as how to go about a job search in Canada, understanding the Canadian corporate culture, expectations of Canadian employers, connecting with Canadian professional networks and so on. The point is that one needs to bridge the knowledge gap between the newcomer's frame of reference and the Canadian context.

The second characteristic is the importance of an internship or work co-op. We find that internships are an effective way for employers to evaluate an individual without making a long-term commitment. It also provides newcomers with the opportunity to gain Canadian experience. Typically, we find that employers will offer employment at the end of an internship, as they discover that the newcomer has a good work ethic and the talent they require.

• (1535)

In 2016, La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso approached COSTI with a proposal to provide funding to support paid internships for professional Syrian refugees. This led COSTI to establish a Syrian refugee professional internship program. Of the 20 refugees in the first round who completed their internships, 18 went on to full-time employment, the majority in the companies where they had interned, including two architects and several accountants.

Enhanced language training and bridging programs use these principles and are effective in bridging skilled newcomers to good jobs. These specialized programs are typically more expensive, but are small investments when one considers that skilled immigrants come to Canada with 14 to 16 years of education that another country has paid for, and our investment is meant to leverage that.

My second recommendation is to encourage the federal government to fund specialized employment programs for newcomers to improve their employment outcomes.

This completes my brief. I thank you for the opportunity to present COSTI's view on a subject that affects the future of Canadians. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mendez-Smith.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith (Executive Director, Four County Labour Market Planning Board): Good afternoon. I'm Gemma Mendez-Smith and I'm the executive director with the Four County Labour Market Planning Board.

We are part of a network of 26 workforce planning boards across Ontario. These boards conduct localized research and actively engage organizations and community partners in local labour market projects.

Each board is as individual as the community it serves. Each addresses labour market issues in its own way, as all communities have their own priorities. As a network, Ontario's workforce planning boards also work together to address labour market issues from a province-wide perspective.

The Four County Labour Market Planning Board serves Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties. This region has been consistently experiencing a low unemployment rate over the last five years. In 2018 the economic region saw its lowest unemployment rate, at 3.7%. In fact, this was the lowest unemployment rate for any economic region in Ontario in the last decade. It is no wonder that our 2019 EmployerOne survey results saw that 72% of responding employers shared that they had hard-to-fill positions, with 37% trying to fill positions for over one year.

To address the challenge of a constricted labour market, the first inclination is to say we need to attract more people. While this is easy to say, it is not easy to accomplish.

First, similar labour market challenges exist across Ontario, so hundreds of communities, large and small, are trying to attract candidates from a finite pool of workers. Second, attracting people is a multi-dimensional undertaking involving housing, transportation, social supports and other things. A plan that focuses on attraction would need to involve a range of services within the region. Third, as it currently stands, Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties already attract thousands of people on an annual basis, though lose a similar number to outmigration, which suggests that significantly increasing the number of residents is not easily achievable.

Our focus, therefore, is on how we engage in labour force development activities through immigration. Even within a constricted labour market, there are ways to increase the supply and quality of the workforce.

This leads me to highlight some of the gaps that our region is experiencing as it relates to settlement services.

At a recent healthy communities partnership meeting, we discussed the need for English as a second language services to be readily available to assist newcomers, including refugees, to build skills in our vibrant job market. This critical service is offered through a volunteer system, which cannot adequately support the flexibility needed to be engaged in the workforce, as well as increase language skills.

Connected to ESL for adults is the gap that exists within schools to support children's integration into the learning environment. To grow our workforce through immigration, we find that parents will decide to stay in a community where settlement services are readily available to help their children. If these services are not available in rural communities, then attracting and retaining this demographic is highly problematic. Communication with peers is imperative for social integration into settlement communities, and if the appropriate levels of supports are not in place, this can lead to isolation and mental health challenges that weigh heavy on young minds.

Settling in rural communities often requires that immigrants separate from their ethnocultural group which, if not addressed through adequate, accessible and appropriate settlement services, can lead to significant feelings of isolation.

Additionally, information and orientation sessions, needs assessments and referrals are integral to settlement in a new community. Newcomers need to learn a whole new way of doing things. For example, how to obtain a social insurance number, where to receive mail, how to set up a bank account, and where they can volunteer in their new community.

I would like to suggest a few recommendations to improve settlement services in rural communities. First, I would like to point out that we cannot look at settlement services as something to supply after people have moved to the area. Instead, it must be a proactive approach in the area as immigrants will use this information to make decisions about where they will move to and where they will grow their new roots.

Settlement service workers would be an asset to rural communities as they are available to serve newcomers immediately and expedite their integration. Settlement workers in our schools, SWIS, will be beneficial to integrate children, as parents often take cues from the well-being of their children. Adults and children alike require these integration services to fully invest in a community.

● (1540)

Another recommendation would be to have more funding for support by settlement service providers and for agencies to train volunteers to be ambassadors for integration, for example, a host family that will ensure that the new family joins a network of local people who will help them find work, enter their children into sports and build a strong social connection.

Knowing how best to support a newcomer family in the community will help support retention in that community and definitely grow the workforce in rural areas.

Technology can be used in a supportive context for settlement services through virtual settlement services. Technology exists in schools and other community services. Almost all newcomers have a smart phone and access to the Internet through libraries and other municipal linkages. While this is not to replace direct interactions, utilizing technology that already exists can aid in enhancing and extending settlement services and will prove to be beneficial in rural Canada.

Isolation is a prevalent factor in rural communities, and we have seen people leave after being there for a very short time because of it. We need to provide more activities that connect newcomers with other community members. Those will go a long way to creating personal bonds to this new community. To aid in this, I recommend making certain that the community connection program is part of settlement services for all rural areas. The social, cultural and professional interactions and connections between newcomers and the community that this program encourages are crucial to keeping immigrants, including refugees, engaged in the community.

Transportation is another factor affecting the newcomer workforce in rural areas. Ensuring that this critical service is available through funding for the settlement service program is vitally important for

immigrants to connect in the community for work, training and general integration. For example, there is no public transportation available in our area, and taxis are very expensive. Newcomers rarely live within the distance of employment opportunities, so supports to help adults get their driver's licence would be a huge benefit.

I would like to highlight that having services offered in rural communities is a positive way forward. Itinerant services, while offering a functional alternative in settlement services in rural areas, are not always ideal as they are itinerant and less flexible and may not be timely.

● (1545)

The Chair: I need to get you to wrap up fairly soon.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Okay.

In conclusion, I recognize that providing services in rural communities will cost more per person than it will in urban areas; however, investments in economic growth and the vitality of employment sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and utilities have enormous returns.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, go ahead for seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Calla.

Thank you for providing these services to the community in the GTA.

One of the things I would like to see achieved out of this study is to determine which settlement programs are effective and which programs are not working and how the government can get some insight into the effectiveness of the programs without putting a lot of burden on the settlement agencies in terms of paperwork, because I know they are very short-staffed.

Do you have any thoughts on how we can measure program effectiveness and what the right metrics are to measure that effectiveness?

Mr. Mario Calla: There are many measures in place. Certain programs are easier to measure than others. For example, I can tell you that I was referring to the employment programs, and clearly if the outcome one looks for is a job, then that's easier to measure. We know, for instance, that in the enhanced language training programs we've been running, last year 90% of the graduates of that program got jobs in their field. In the mentoring program, it was about 75%. We measure that, and that's easier.

Where the challenge basically comes is in the other settlement services that seemed like softer services in the sense that there isn't a hard outcome like a job, but each of those services is a step toward integration.

I think there are two things that at least I as a service provider try to keep in mind in terms of outcomes. One is that to measure integration, you need a much longer-term plan. The structure for that is in place. The IRCC has its iCARE database into which we all input the information of every client we see, and that database has basic information on services provided and the outputs of those services.

What I would like to see is a long-term look at that, because they can follow these clients. If the person gets a service in Toronto and moves to Winnipeg, they can pick that up in the system and know what services are being activated there. Hopefully, at some point they can match that to CRA data, income tax data, to see how the individual is doing economically and so on. That's what researchers do. Those are true integration outcomes, and I think the system is there.

The short part is what challenges us day to day. What we did for the Syrian refugees were short outputs—the first thing was to find them housing, so they got housing, etc.—but we did follow-up studies because we wanted to know how that worked.

We did a one-year study and a two-year study. The questions were basic: are you taking English classes; do you have a job; that sort of thing. But there were other questions we asked such as whether they had made any friends outside of the Syrian community. We were pleased to see that 73% responded yes. Were their children involved in after-school activities? Ninety-six per cent of the kids were, which means that they are trusting Canadian institutions to look after their kids. We asked about their emotional health. Seventy-five per cent said that it had improved since they have come to Canada.

These are the kinds of measures that need to be taken, but in response to your question, that was an initiative we took on our own. It's not integrated into the actual program, so we're looking at setting up something at COSTI, a quality assurance position, to help us with that.

We have just started to pilot—I'm sorry; I'm taking too long, but it's a big really important question.

● (1550)

We happen to have a settlement worker who has a Ph.D. and understands research, and so we've engaged her for a second job where we're doing exit interviews with all the refugees going through our RAP, our resettlement assistance program.

We're getting qualitative information that then provides continuous improvement, from the feedback we're getting from the refugees, on how we're doing, what worked and what didn't work.

That's the short-term quality piece. I say the long-term one would be the government's iCARE piece.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I saw that you offer some specific programs for the newcomer woman.

Mr. Mario Calla: Yes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: In the riding I represent, I see that it takes a very long time, and many women can't integrate fully into Canadian society.

Is there any specific program you would like to share which has been successful in integrating women specifically?

Mr. Mario Calla: We have one program that was funded by the province, and the funding just terminated. I can tell you, it was so successful and so moving that our employees were in tears when we found out that it had been terminated. We called it the women of courage program. This program basically invited women who had been in violent relationships, who had been out of the workforce for long periods of time.

One component of it was confidence building, trust building, sharing their experiences, and understanding that what they went through was not about them; it was about what happened to them. We had this in partnership with Humber College. Through this process, the women would identify a career path. Then Humber College provided the training for them, a condensed training. We had women going into bookkeeping, and so on.

Every single one of them ended up with a job afterwards. The testimonials we got from these women were incredible because it was more than a job; it was about their future in terms of the level of confidence they built through this process.

There are models like that. We have a number of other programs to help women with financial literacy, confidence building and so on, which are very effective.

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. Tilson you have seven minutes.

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

Ms. Mendez-Smith, my riding is called Dufferin—Caledon. It is immediately south of the counties that you represent. Many of the particular challenges that you mentioned, my riding has. I had a whole slew of questions, but you've pretty well answered all of them.

Maybe we can talk about some of the issues. You've listed off a number of challenges. Of course, there is always a mix of smaller towns, farms and rural communities in which those problems, those issues are quite different from those that exist in the cities, which have more money, for a start. I wonder if you could zero in on that.

You listed off the challenges, but maybe you could emphasize the ones that are of greatest concern to you.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Absolutely, and thank you for the opportunity.

The main things that we look at in the rural communities are around transportation and housing. Those are the two pieces that are key priorities for us as we look at workforce development.

In our region, we have thousands of jobs that go unfilled on a regular basis. We talked about employers' saying they can't fill jobs. If we are to engage in the attraction of a workforce to live and work in rural communities, thinking about how we're going to do integration of immigrants into our rural communities needs to be a little bit different from how that happens in the cities and urban centres, for sure.

Taking into consideration the idea that many of the funding opportunities that come out look at a critical mass of people already in the community, rural communities don't have the luxury of being able to say they have x number of immigrants already living here, so they need service. We need to look at it as our goal. Our goal is to grow the workforce. We have jobs that are going unfilled. What can we do, proactively, to ensure that we can attract and integrate that workforce into our region?

It will take looking at housing differently, if we have larger families coming into our region, and certainly, a consideration of what we are going to do about transportation. I live smack dab in the middle of fields, and there is no transportation. We need to think about how we're going to do that well in rural communities.

• (1555)

Mr. David Tilson: I expect that a lot of those problems exist because of funding. In terms of transportation and housing, the rural communities, the small-town communities just don't have the resources.

Have you had any discussions with the provincial or federal governments as to how to deal with these issues? Everybody can't live in the city.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: When we talk to our local municipalities, and through some of the funding applications that we put forward, we do talk about the lack of transportation and what we can do. Our funding is not appropriate for what we need to have in transportation. That's for sure. Recently we offered a program for training people, and it cost us.... You know, it costs \$50 for a taxi one way to get to a community that's 10 minutes away.

Mr. David Tilson: How are you funded?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: We are funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for the work that we do for workforce development.

Mr. David Tilson: Do you receive any funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: No, we don't.

Mr. David Tilson: Should you?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Yes, we should for workforce development and integration.

Mr. David Tilson: Do you receive funding from any other federal departments?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: No, we don't. We are primarily funded.... I will clarify that our funding comes through the labour market agreement. The agreement between the federal and provincial governments is where the funding for local boards comes from.

Mr. David Tilson: You mentioned English training in your community. What are the main issues that you have with respect to being able to access language training in your area, those counties that you represent?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Not having the established training available in the community for English as a second language is certainly an issue. When we welcome or try to integrate immigrants into our community, it's not readily available. There is no funding for English as a second language in any of the four counties that we serve.

It's really done through volunteers. The volunteer time is how we're able to provide that service, but it's not adequate to be able to get people to the language level they need to be integrated into the workplace. Having that funded as a service we offer in our community would certainly help us be able to bridge the gap between people moving into our area and being able to be gainfully employed.

Mr. David Tilson: In my riding we have something called Caledon Community Services that provides language training. They, in turn, get funding from the Region of Peel, which of course, has more resources than you do, or indeed, Dufferin County, which is the other part that I have.

I would think that's one of the major issues that you have. You know you're going to have to have language training, but you don't have the resources to provide it. Would that be a fair assessment?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Correct.

Mr. David Tilson: The other issue that you got into—and I know I'm going into areas that you've already talked about, and it was an excellent presentation—is the retention of newcomers, particularly in rural communities.

I wonder if you could elaborate more on how you feel that, particularly in dealing with rural communities and small-town communities, the retention of newcomers should take place?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: There's, of course, education that needs to happen within the community when you're welcoming new people to your community. They look different. They have different cultural desires and expectations. It does change the dynamics of the community.

It's making sure that we have the services, first of all, to help people get to where they need to be, which are the things that I talked about: "How do I integrate here; how do I know when the mail comes; when is the garbage picked up; where do I get my OHIP application?" All of those things are not readily within the community where you live when it's in a rural community.

Then there's having services that help the community be involved on a cultural level, to be able to understand when we bring new people into our community, what they need to know and what we need to understand in our community as well to be able to help the integration.

Integration is one of the biggest aspects for rural communities. When I moved to my rural community, I'm the only one—still, 17 years later—in our community. So it's about us communicating with our community and our community being able to communicate back to help build integration.

Mr. David Tilson: Are the boards of education contributing to language training, not just for children, but for adults?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: The boards of education, so far, in Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties are not particularly involved. There are some pockets where ESL, English as a second language, happens, but it's not across the board.

• (1600)

Mr. David Tilson: Have you made representations to those boards?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Yes. We speak very closely with our boards, and there's a lot more work happening with the Bruce Power life-extension project. There are a lot more people moving into our region, so there's a lot more work happening around this integration.

Mr. David Tilson: Under the—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you're half a minute over.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for your presentations.

I am particularly interested in learning more about the successes of the matching up of employment opportunities with employers. Even though those programs might cost a little more, from what I am understanding from other organizations as well, those have been particularly effective in actually ensuring the outcome. That is to say, the participants land a job in their field or area of interest that can further their career goals and therefore maximize all of the potentials for everybody's needs.

Mr. Calla, you talked about this as a pilot program. I think you said that you had a program as such. Can you share with us the information on the cost of the program and who funds you? If you were to run this as a regular program, what would you need?

Mr. Mario Calla: The pilot program I spoke about was the internship program for refugees. Surprisingly, we did it on \$50,000. It worked out to about \$2,200 per person, per client. It was very effective. As I say, there were two architects, several accountants, one engineer.... These were all high-end jobs. It's possible to do. It wasn't funded by any order of government. It was a private foundation. That's the kind of thing we would like to see.

You're absolutely right about the role of the employer. That's a key ingredient. Our employment consultants and our staff work hard at establishing those relationships with employers. I'll give you an example. One company in Vaughan, Rex Power Magnetics, makes electrical transformers. Once they got to know us and saw that we were sending quality, talented people to them, over the last number of years they've hired over 200 of our clients—immigrants and refugees—because they know we can deliver. It's about the relationship.

There are other players in Toronto, like the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, with CIBC and TD. CIBC has done over 1,100 mentoring matches.

What is really important about those relationships is that we also influence the company. We talk about Canadian experience. I mentioned it in my remarks as it is such a big issue that they don't have Canadian experience. That's really a bit of a catch-all, for we, as employers, don't know if they understand our corporate culture here in Canada or our work ethic. We don't know if they understand how we operate. If the individual has had some experience in a Canadian company, then they have some comfort that the individual gets it.

Those kinds of relationships transform the company and the co-op or internship also helps with that issue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Are the participants in those internships paid?

Mr. Mario Calla: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you ensure that our committee gets information—just as you articulated, but in fuller detail—on how this program worked and so on?

This is a viable example of how governments should fund it and not be reliant on organizations working on the side of the desk. Hopefully someone somewhere along the line will fund it. Clearly, it's a successful example.

Ms. Mendez-Smith, I wonder if you have anything else to add. You're not funded for resettlement purposes in your organization, but clearly this would be a very important component to resettlement. Again, along those lines, I wonder if you have specific requests for the government to support your work in your organization and others across the country to maximize the outcomes that I think we all desire.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Absolutely.

Recently, we partnered with a company in Toronto to help train refugees and then bring them to our region, which is the town of The Blue Mountains, where we need workers in hospitality and tourism. You have that strain of having people in a housing situation in Toronto where they're not necessarily getting work. We have work in our region. Being able to support that training and moving that workforce to the regions where there is work would be very beneficial to all of us.

I listen to the radio all the time. I hear about the struggles that are happening with refugees in Toronto. We have training programs that are happening. We have gaps to fill in jobs.

We currently offer some training for manufacturers. Our Four County Labour Market Planning Board works directly with the employers to fill those jobs. We have had lots of people gain jobs. We just don't have the housing in our region to support that workforce. We already have the training. If we could combine those two, we could meet the needs of our rural employers for sure.

● (1605)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder whether or not you could send something to our committee to more fulsomely express that need and how to match it up. I think that would be appreciated as well.

In fact, just during the break week, I was in Victoria. I met with a refugee who was hired by Vancity, which recognized his training from before. He is now working up to becoming a manager in the branch, which is very exciting. These are stories that we never hear. People are just kind of doing it off on the side, but if we could coordinate our efforts in a concerted way, I suspect that we would be met with greater success.

On a different issue, I wonder if your organizations have come across individuals who have had their training, but they have this problem that they left their country without any of their papers because of the state of the place they have left. The university may have been flattened because it was bombed and they can't get their credentials verified. Consequently, they have nowhere to begin. They literally have to start from the beginning and go through a B.A. and so on and so forth.

I wonder if you have encountered that problem with people who have come to your organization. If so, do you have any proposals for the government for how we could address this issue?

Again, that's a waste of talent that we should try to capitalize on.

The Chair: You only have five seconds.

Mr. Mario Calla: The answer is yes, we've encountered it and—

The Chair: I have to cut you off. I'm sorry.

Mr. Mario Calla: —the response is World Education Services.

The Chair: Mr. Tabbara, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): I'll let them answer briefly.

Mr. Mario Calla: World Education Services is the provincial body that does credentials assessment. They ran a pilot with us at COSTI for the Syrian refugees who did not have their documents with them. There are other ways to assess an individual's credentials. It was a success, and they're continuing that, so people who don't have documents can go to World Education Services and get some confirmation.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

Ms. Mendez-Smith, there are a couple of things you were mentioning in your testimony and in answering questions. You said that 30%.... You've been trying to fill those positions for over a year. Also, when you were asked questions, you said that you don't have housing in certain communities.

I want to talk about the investments that our government has made. We've looked at integration and opportunity, and the success of Canadians and newcomers requires a substantial amount of investment. That's why we moved forward with the national housing strategy of \$40 billion over 10 years, so that we can alleviate the pressures that we're seeing with housing in metropolitan areas, whether it's Toronto or Vancouver and even in rural areas.

I know that in my area some wait-lists for housing are six-plus years, and it's higher in the GTA, from what I hear.

We've also made historic investments in transit and in infrastructure, and we've increased settlement funding by 20% since 2016. These are some of the things we've invested in so that Canadians and newcomers can see their potential success currently and in the future.

With these types of investments, have you seen positive results within settlement services, within newcomers coming to your regions?

Obviously, we need to do more. More investments are needed in rural areas. Adding to that, we've put forward the new rural and northern immigration pilot. Can you elaborate on that?

•(1610)

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: I would have to say offhand that no, we haven't seen a lot of the benefits of the housing situation in our region. I know that our local municipalities are working towards changing some bylaws that will allow some different types of housing, but we haven't seen significant movement on that portfolio yet, which is going to be an important key for us moving forward.

On the topic of the rural and northern partnership, most of our region didn't qualify for the program. We had a lot of our partners across our four county region desperately looking at how we might be able to benefit through this program. Unfortunately, most of our communities didn't qualify. That's why I spoke about the fact that, although we may not have critical mass and although there might be services available in Barrie, London or Kitchener-Waterloo, it is not close enough, and the transportation becomes an issue for residents to get to those services, and it may not be available when they need it.

What we would like to see when we talk about rural communities is how we can get that service in our community so that, if someone comes in today, they can get that service tomorrow, not weeks or months away, to get them integrated into the community, really thinking about, when that distance is determined, what the other parameters are that might have a region considered outside of that main parameter.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: If we look at the pilot, it's for cities that have a population of 50,000 or less, and it needs to be 75 kilometres from a major city in order to qualify. Maybe you're 50 kilometres or so from a major city, and maybe the population might be closer to 75,000.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: It depends on if you're looking at the municipality or the county, lower tier, upper tier. Yes, there were many things that disqualified our region.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I think that we've put forward this pilot to benefit a lot of rural communities that might be 200 or 300 kilometres away from a major city, if not more. We've had testimony that said it has benefited them.

What would you like to see as a tweak or a slight change so that maybe your community may be able to benefit? We have put in substantial money for infrastructure and transit for a lot of communities, and a lot of communities have said that they have benefited from that. What kind of change would you like to see to that pilot program?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: I think we need to take into consideration the labour market situation. We have a lot of jobs and we have a low unemployment rate, which means we don't have the bodies we need to continue to support economic vibrancy in our region. If we looked at that as a reason for an investment in our community, I think we could help support that rural community. We talked to most of our partners about whether we could actually apply for this funding. We realized quickly that we couldn't but we also realized the value in having something that suits us.

We are close to and higher than the numbers identified in the project application, but we are still the economic region with the lowest unemployment rate. Bruce Power has thousands of jobs and many of our other employers have hundreds of jobs going unfilled on an annual basis. I just shared 2019 data with you. We have five years of data that show this has been getting progressively worse. We really need to think about it in the context of how to fill those jobs.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: We have increased the settlement funding, as I mentioned, by 20% since 2016, so that has trickled down to a lot of communities. I know in my community they said yes, they had seen an increase, and obviously they want to see more increases.

Mr. Calla, have you noticed that with—

The Chair: You have very limited time. You have your clock open, I'm sure, so you know.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: —an overall approach of investing in housing and settlement services, that increased funding has benefited your area?

Mr. Mario Calla: Yes, I can say quickly that the housing has been slow. It's the kind of thing that takes a while, that kind of infrastructure, so we're very happy to see that. It's the biggest issue in the greater Toronto area. One area that you haven't mentioned that has been significant is—

The Chair: I need to end it there. I'm sorry.

Mr. Mario Calla: —the child tax benefit. It's making a big difference in the lives of people to pay the rent.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Maguire, you have five minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks, witnesses, for your presentations.

I also, as Ms. Mendez-Smith does, come from an area of small communities. In fact, I just wrote down 36 of them in my constituency. That's not counting four that still have a signpost but hardly anybody lives there, maybe five or 10 people.

With respect to getting access to some of these training opportunities, there are jobs in those areas in many of these small towns. Someone from Cartwright, Manitoba, was here about a month ago. He made a presentation to us on what they've done with Westman Immigrant Services in Brandon, Manitoba, as a centre out of Winnipeg. From that area. I think there are actually 100,000 people, unless they've changed it, in the rural and northern development program.

Everybody outside of Winnipeg qualifies in Manitoba but it's a situation where there aren't one or two or five or 10 people being accepted in those areas. I think the government indicated there would only be 15 or 20 places. Well, if you're going to limit the number of communities to be involved, you need to have hundreds of people apply for work in one company or in that area in order to really qualify.

You're saying there's no English training funded in your region. They have to come in to Brandon and there are areas here where they are. Fortunately, in Cartwright, some English training is also done by volunteers.

Can you expand on that? What do you think can be done outside of the funding that Mr. Tilson, my colleague, referred to? I think it's a big thing that you mentioned in your earlier comment, that transportation and housing are big problems as well.

We had situations where the housing was available, when I was an MLA, before I became a federal member.

Can you comment on how volunteers in a community help make these people feel at home, and how important that is to their fitting into the community in the long term?

● (1615)

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: I'll start with the volunteers. I can use myself as an example. When we moved into the rural community—we're on farmland—the neighbours came over and said, "This is what we volunteer to do. What would you like to do?" It wasn't, "If you would like to do it," it was just an automatic acceptance that we were now part of the community, and so, "This is what we expect you to do." That really helped, and 17 years later, when my daughter left to go to school, that's the one thing she would miss.

When we talk about integration, it's about how someone feels a part of that community immediately, so they decide to stay. With immigration, you've already uprooted yourself from another home, and you're now here. How do you plant new roots and become integrated? That integration with the community is quite important—for someone to not just welcome you, but to integrate you into that community.

Around the language piece, we find that because of the critical mass in our area when it comes to immigration, we are not funded normally for services offered. There are key individuals in our community who see this as a need, so they volunteer their services. While English as a second language is available online, it's not always accessible or ideal for people to learn through that online method. While there are pockets of services, if we're talking about building skills in English as a second language in order to enter the labour market, we need a more focused and aggressive approach.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Calla, you were indicating that you started the organization in 1952, I believe, in Toronto. You've learned a lot of lessons over the years then, in regard to the integration of the individual we were just talking about. Of course, in Toronto there's a greater opportunity for them to find work, and probably a greater community for each one of the immigrants or refugees who may come into those areas. Can you elaborate quickly on how your organization is funded as well, how you see some of the integration taking place and the most important things you found in immigration over the years?

Mr. Mario Calla: Our organization is funded federally through IRCC and through Employment and Social Development Canada for some of the youth programs. Provincially, the MTC, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, as with Ms. Mendez-Smith's organization, funds employment programs. We also have violence against women programs and mental health programs through the province. We have services through the city. We provide shelter services, and some programs for people on Ontario works. It's a broad range, including private foundations, and that sort of thing. What we try to do—

• (1620)

The Chair: Wrap up quickly, please.

Mr. Mario Calla: It's a holistic approach, with English language training, employment, settlement, supports, mental health counselling, whatever it takes to help a person become a productive citizen. That approach seems to work best.

The Chair: Mr. Ayoub, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm going to stay on the topic of funding.

Mr. Calla, you were explaining that you received funding from a number of departments as well as the city and that you had to satisfy various criteria in order to obtain the funding. I looked at your annual report, and I saw that federal and provincial government institutions, as well as the city, provided your organization with funding. I even read that the U.S. embassy in Ottawa was one of your donors, which surprised me a little.

What criteria do you have to satisfy to obtain all of that funding? Administration-wise, how much time do you spend looking for funding? What is your annual budget? I didn't see that in your annual report.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Calla: Our annual budget is \$32 million. We're the largest settlement organization in Ontario.

Yes, basically when you're doing this work day in and day out, you can see what's working and what's not working and what's missing. Our staff works at identifying those needs and going to the appropriate sources, so if we know that it is within the mandate of the provincial government, we approach them and say that the issue is something that we have an idea how to address.

You mentioned, for example, that some of these things happen accidentally. You saw on our website that one of the funders was the Secretary of State, the American government. They approached us. They wanted to do something with the Syrian refugee program and heard that we were working with youth, and they actually funded a very successful youth program, whose funding has ended. Those Syrian youth now are involved in the community in volunteer activities and so on. These were youth whom we felt were marginalized because they didn't speak English. They weren't fitting in at high school, and now they're actually doing speaking engagements for us.

These are the kinds of things that we identify and then we approach governments and, sometimes, as I say in that instance, they approach us.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: What about your side, Madam Mendez-Smith?

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: On our funding level, we are funded to do our research at \$280,000 a year, with three staff, and we have two training programs that we do for persons with disabilities and Ontario works, which is for people who need skills to enter the labour market, at about \$500,000.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: People,

[*English*]

do they pay something? You're offering the service. Do they pay each time? Is it a free service?

Mr. Mario Calla: It's a free service.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

Madam Smith, I am going to switch to French. I have very limited time and I want to speak fast.

[*Translation*]

Are there not enough refugees and immigrants? Have you tried to get immigrants to come to your counties to look for work? Is that an approach you use? If not, is it simply a matter of jobs being available and immigrants coming to the area by sheer coincidence? How does it work? Have you used both approaches?

[*English*]

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: We have several approaches. One is we work with people who have moved to our region and they're already there, but our main goal is to grow the workforce so it will be a targeted approach to get people to move to the region who are looking for the type of work that we have available.

• (1625)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That's before they come to the country.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: No, that's not before they come to the country.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay, that's one specific thing.

On your side, Mr. Calla, do you have any other approaches? Is it only people who are already in Canada?

Mr. Mario Calla: Well, yes, except that we do have a pre-arrival service funded by the federal government, IRCC, so that there are offices in cities where there is a high number of immigrants who come to Canada, and so they give them our contact information. They connect with us via email, and we provide that service.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to stop you there. I'm sorry. I'm feeling very rude today.

That's going to end our first panel. I want to move as quickly as we can because we are expecting bells to ring at one point, so I'm going to ask our witnesses to leave, with our thanks. You have been very helpful. Thank you also for your work on the things that we care the most about.

Ms. Gemma Mendez-Smith: Thank you.

The Chair: Before I suspend, I want to welcome students from Trinity Western University. When I notice a group come in, I always wonder who they are. It's delightful to have you here in Ottawa. Thank you for coming, and I hope this is an informative time for you.

We'll suspend for a moment while we get our witness on the video conference.

First, I would like to go over the schedule for the next week. I have my personal notes but they're in English only because I worked them out today with the clerk and the analysts. If anybody wants them, I can hand them out. I'll give them to Alex and anybody who wants them can take them.

We can meet on Monday, May 6, at our normal time at 3:30 to begin the consideration of division 15; that's the consultants point. However, the meeting will be booked for four hours. By the end, by the way, we will have met three times on division 15 and three times on division 16 for a total of eight hours each, which is the equivalent of eight meetings. The motion is for a minimum of six meetings, but we're meeting for the number of hours the NDP motion had requested.

It's four hours on May 6, from 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The minister, officials and witnesses will be here for the first three hours. The last hour will be drafting instructions on this study, settlement services, so the analysts can start working on that. That's four hours on May 6.

There's a three-hour special meeting, on Tuesday, May 7, from 9 a.m. to noon on division 15, with three panels of witnesses.

There's a second meeting the same day, May 7, from 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. This will begin division 16, which is the IRPA amendments, with the minister, officials and then two panels of witnesses.

The next day, on May 8, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., there will be two panels on division 16.

Those four meetings, one on May 6, two on May 7 and one on May 8 will be the meetings to hear witnesses, ministers and officials.

On Friday of that week, May 10, there will be a noon deadline for amendments you would like considered on divisions 15 and 16, to submit them to Parliamentary Counsel. I would like them to come to us as well so we can use them for our meeting on the following Monday, with both Parliamentary Counsel and the Clerk.

As well that day, May 10, just so you know, we'll get the draft migration study report circulated to the committee for consideration.

The following week, on May 13, at the normal time, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., we will consider the report for division 15, which will turn into a letter to the finance committee. This is an unusual process

because we've taken on something from finance. On May 15, we will report consideration of division 16 at our normal time. We have two hours to deal with division 16 and the letter you want me to send to finance.

That will conclude divisions 15 and 16 of part 4 of the BIA.

Then we have a constituency week and we come back on May 27 and it looks as if we will then consider the main estimates at that meeting with the minister. The mains will be dealt with on May 27.

Did I get all that right?

After May 27, we'll be working on completing the settlement services study report and the migration report, after we finish divisions 15 and 16 and the mains.

The clerk will get that out. Nothing is official until you get your notice of meeting, however, because the ministers haven't confirmed their presence. I'm attempting to have them come to those meetings. We may need to mix and match. Those times will be good. The exact agenda may change a little.

•(1630)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can I get a clarification for May 10?

That's not an actual meeting date, is it?

The Chair: No.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's just a date for distribution of—

The Chair: May 10 is not a meeting date. It's just a deadline for that.

The witnesses, by the way, on divisions 15 and 16, will be done mathematically, with 60% being witnesses selected by the Liberals, 30% by the Conservatives and 10% by the NDP.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

Can you give us the numbers now? Instead of the three meetings, there will now be four meetings, right? So, there will be eight meetings in total.

The Chair: I have that on another document.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can we get the numbers?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: For division 15 there will be 12 witnesses; 7.2 Liberals, so seven witnesses Liberal; 3.6 or four Conservative, and one New Democrat for a total of 12. It's the same thing now. We've just increased it for division 16. There were going to be nine, but there will now be 12, so it will be seven, four and one witnesses.

There's going to be overlap. Frankly, if I were you, I'd talk to each other, if you want to do that. However, it's up to you to do that. It will be seven, four and one.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Is that for both divisions?

The Chair: That's for both divisions, yes.

Ms. Buuck, welcome and thank you for coming.

Ms. Christine Buuck (Associate Vice-President, Academic Administration and International Education, Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning): Thank you.

The Chair: We are continuing the meeting.

As well, we have Professor Shields from Ryerson coming to us via video conference.

Welcome.

We're going to begin with Professor Shields, because sometimes we have to deal with technology.

We see you. You hear us and you see us, so let's go with it.

You have seven minutes.

Thank you.

Professor John Shields (Professor, Department of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, and Interim Director, Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement, As an Individual): Thanks so much for the invitation to appear before you today.

Canada is an international leader in government supported and provided settlement services for its immigrant population. This is part of the widely renowned Canadian model of immigration and settlement that includes the system of managed migration, an official policy of multiculturalism, the timely naturalization of newcomers and a wide range of government supported settlement programs that are delivered by non-profit organizations close to the immigrant communities that they serve.

Such provision of services is an important part in enabling immigrants to more successfully settle and integrate in Canada. Government funding of settlement services not only provides material newcomer support but sends a symbolic welcoming message to immigrants and to Canadian society about the value of immigration to Canada.

Integration is approached as a two-way process for immigrants to adapt to life in Canada and for Canada to welcome and adapt to newcomers. This approach is critical for providing the warmth of welcome to newcomers that is absolutely essential for successful immigration. It is a model that has proven successful and that needs to be preserved and strengthened.

There have been some recent developments in this regard that have been positive and that I think are worthy to note. First is the move to a longer term, in this case, a three-year immigration levels plan, in terms of yearly numbers of permanent residents to be settled in Canada. This enables settlement organizations to better plan services into the future.

Second, with increased immigration levels, federal funding for settlement services have also been increased to match the new immigration numbers, providing a continuity in funding support.

Third is IRCC's move this year to issue funding proposals with five-year time frames based on a performance approach. This, again, offers settlement organizations the ability to plan into the future. Past approaches of one-year competitive funding created considerable financial instability in the settlement service sector, as organizational finances going into the future could not be depended upon. Extreme levels of employment and organizational precarity were often the

result for the sector. The five-year funding approach helps to mitigate such precarity.

Fourth, IRCC has begun to move toward an approach to managing funding dollars in a more flexible manner focused more on outputs, that is, performance goals, rather than inputs, a counting widgets approach. This will enable organizations to more effectively use funding dollars for settlement success with fewer dollars caught up in overly restrictive reporting processes. These are more effective funding dollars.

More stable, multi-year funding allows for both long-term planning of services and broader development within the settlement sector. By continuing to improve stability in the settlement sector for both services and staff, resilience is extended to newcomer communities, which are continually strengthened by effective institutions and services. These recent developments by IRCC are positive developments that should strengthen settlement service delivery and effectiveness.

There are, of course, some issues that need further attention. I want to quickly address four of these. First is settlement service eligibility. IRCC should reconsider its stringent eligibility requirements for federally funded settlement services. Those who are most disadvantaged by this policy include refugee claimants and international students, and this is particularly important with respect to express entries.

So many express entry applicants and successful express entry recruits are from international students as well as temporary foreign workers. These are mostly visible minority migrants, often with limited social and human capital, who are already facing great barriers in settlement. Many immigrants and refugees who become Canadian citizens may still need further support in the long term in terms of their settlement. Better funding and facilitating the social inclusion of these groups would greatly decrease their vulnerability.

●(1635)

I think policy-makers should at the very least permit greater flexibility in determining the length of time individuals are eligible for particular settlement services. By allowing those in need to access these programs, the government could foster better settlement outcomes and greater resilience among those most affected by the challenges of establishing a life in Canada.

It's also important to note that refugee claimants and international students usually have work permits. They need help finding employment, but they cannot at present access IRCC-funded services. This, of course, is becoming ever more important in the case of Ontario, for example, because the province has scaled back its funding for these groups. This year in Ontario, settlement agencies lost funding for projects for refugees and other vulnerable newcomers who were formerly financed through the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. That now has been eliminated by the new Conservative government.

A second point is pre-arrival services. Newcomer resilience can often be best fostered before the settlement journey even begins by offering a wider range of pre-arrival services. Pre-arrival settlement services not only orient and prepare newcomers for settlement in Canada; they also help connect them with services and support upon arrival. The IRCC has embraced pre-arrival services for prospective economic-class immigrants and are funding non-profit providers that target programming geared to such occupations and areas of specialization as engineering, entrepreneurship, finance, supply chains and the like. The Canadian Council for Refugees also notes that these services are particularly important for refugees coming to Canada, and emphasizes that some of those services should also be delivered in a refugee's first language.

The ability for agencies to provide a continuum of services from pre-arrival to employment, however, is limited, because pre-arrival and post-arrival services are funded through two separate pots of money. Pre-arrival services originally prepared clients only to enter post-arrival employment services upon arrival; really it was more of a referral model. Some sector-specific pre-arrival programs are preparing clients for employment before they arrive, and some clients are job-placed before they come. The majority, however, when they arrive in Canada need to make use of other services, particularly employment services.

• (1640)

The Chair: I'll need you to come to a conclusion fairly soon.

Prof. John Shields: Okay.

Hence, program funding that connects pre- and post-arrival services would enhance the continuity of services and result in services that are more effective.

I'll briefly mention two others. I won't go into any of the details. I think another area is targeted services for newcomers facing particular barriers of social inclusion. I think these are also needed. My last point is about the need for more family-centred programming. We often approach programming based upon the idea of the individual immigrant, but immigrants mostly come with their families. I think we need programming that recognizes and uses that family lens in terms of designing the programming.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. If you want to flesh those out by sending documentation to the committee, that would be helpful, if you choose to do so.

Prof. John Shields: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Buuck.

Ms. Christine Buuck: Good afternoon, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet with you today.

My name is Christine Buuck and I'm the associate vice-president of academic administration and international education at Conestoga College. We are located in Kitchener-Waterloo. Conestoga is one of 24 publicly funded colleges in Ontario and one of 13 polytechnics across Canada.

To serve our workforce needs, we offer more than 200 career-focused programs. Our programs incorporate experiential and work-integrated learning with input from over a thousand industry and community leaders.

Conestoga has a long history in offering specialized programming and services to support newcomers. I have had the privilege of being part of that for the past 30 years. It occurred to me as I was flying here today that I began my career in 1989 in a program for newcomers that included a language program with a workplace component. I can tell you we've come a long way.

Programs that are now offered at Conestoga include language instruction for newcomers to Canada, LINC, which is provided to over a thousand newcomers each year. We offer occupation specific language training, self-employment for newcomers, building excellence in entrepreneurship, language interpreter programs, and a TESL program. Our graduates are teaching in the ESL and LINC programs in our community and beyond, including IELTS testing.

Today, as we discuss settlement services for newcomers, I would like to focus on the importance of community collaboration, which has already been talked about, but I'd like to give some concrete examples. You asked about what success looks like. It includes integration of services, innovation and pathways to employment.

With regard to collaboration and integration of services, community partnerships that focus on this are key to providing successful programming for newcomers. Let me give you some examples.

No longer do we offer a language program in isolation. Our partner, in our case, CKW YMCA settlement services, ensures that language assessment upfront is done.

We also offer settlement advising by settlement workers. This is beyond what Conestoga does. Our partner provides that for us. We ensure there are orientation and information sessions to help integrate newcomers, again, beyond language programming.

We have often talked about barriers, barriers of transportation, barriers because there is no child care. To overcome this, we have partnered with the local YWCAs who provide child care for us.

We are recognizing an increase of newcomers with various needs. We have partnered with the CNIB to assist us in providing programming for individuals with visual impairments.

Our language interpreter program is offered in partnership with the multicultural centre, and it goes on.

With regard to innovation, encouraging, supporting and sharing innovative initiatives are essential for continuous improvement of programming for newcomers. Where are those innovations? We know they're out there. For example, our faculty team saw there was a need to develop language assessment tools, something that was concrete, the ability to assess language skills within a real world task-based context with clearly described outcomes that could be measured.

Our faculty also felt strongly that the assessment tools should be shared, that faculty teachers across the country shouldn't be doing this in isolation but should share what they are doing.

Our faculty posted over 160 assessments on Tutela, IRCC's national platform, a great initiative by the way. The response has been more than 6,500 views and 2,000 downloads in this past year alone.

We know there are many more innovations out there. We think these should be readily available for all.

●(1645)

Finally, on pathways to employment, newcomers are eager to begin their lives in Canada. Employment-related programming needs to begin as soon as possible. Our feedback from our newcomers is that they're stressed when they arrive about work, about entering the workforce.

Here are some examples of things that have been working. Incorporate LINC to work with language modules that focus on workplace English in Canadian workplace culture integrated throughout the LINC program, beginning with literacy level 1. It can be done. With employment advising, LINC participants receive one-on-one advice to develop individualized learning and career plans. LINC in the workplace offers language programming in the workplace. Conestoga has piloted this model and is working with employers to expand it so that language training is not separated and is right in the workplace.

I'd like to talk about occupation-specific language training, OSLT. IRCC funded 13 colleges in Ontario, including Conestoga, to deliver occupation-specific language training. It prepares newcomers to find and retain work within their professional fields. OSLT covers six sectors and 35 occupations, sectors such as health sciences, business, technology, human service and skilled trades. Many of our graduates of this programming require further training. They focus on the community service sector. They may end up in our ECE program and fast-track. We have folks in business going into accounting and into the workplace.

Another program I'd like to briefly mention is self-employment for newcomers, building excellence in entrepreneurship. This is a 16-week funded program and provides one-on-one support, information, resources, tools and business planning training to newcomers who are focused on starting their own businesses. For your information, I have included some of our success stories.

Finally, we have recommendations.

Collaboration and integrated services are key to what we do. It's no longer stand-alones. It is focused on our newcomers' needs, with newcomer input.

You mentioned the importance of the whole family. Right now for language programming and child programming, parents and children are separate. We are piloting a program, families as authors, newcomers as authors, to share their program beyond our LINC program, but with members in our own community.

Again, a continued focus on programming that provides pathways to employment is key.

I have not spoken much about this, but an enhancement of programming for newcomers with special needs has been mentioned:

Thank you.

●(1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will begin questioning with Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I will be sharing some of my time with Mr. Tabbara. Ms. Buuck is from Kitchener and I think he wants to ask her a few questions.

Mr. Shields, that was a great presentation. I have a few questions that we get asked.

Settlement services provide a great array of services. We've been hearing that. One of the challenges I find as well in Surrey is that temporary foreign workers, international students and refugees don't get that service because they're not eligible for it. Would international students not be the responsibility of the colleges? They are charging them a lot of money. Should they not provide or fund some services that maybe settlement agencies like the ones you represent do? I think that's a different function, as opposed to an immigrant. They're charging them money. It's for profit. They're coming. They do require settlement services when they come, simple stuff from where to live and how to get a bus pass and how to get their medical card. They should provide that. Do you think that would be a service they should be obliged to fund?

Prof. John Shields: I think what we find with universities and colleges is that increasingly they are providing more services for international students. I see it more as a shared responsibility. Increasingly a large proportion of international students are being recruited through express entry. So what we really do need, I think, especially are the job-related aspects of the services for this group. It's going to increase the effectiveness of their integration into Canadian society. I think government and the universities and colleges should work together on this.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What about for temporary foreign workers? That's a conundrum, where somebody's coming in specifically on the demand of an employer to fill a need the employer has. They come in to work and they're not necessarily on a pathway to permanency.

Prof. John Shields: No.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: But they may be. Once they are on the pathway to permanency, obviously, they are the responsibility of the federal government. But in that interim, should employers not be responsible to provide them the basic things required for their settlement?

Prof. John Shields: I think that would be ideal. I think in practice that often does not happen. It would be good to have more co-operation on the part of employers in terms of doing more of this. I think there is still some responsibility on the part of the federal government to be a bit more flexible in terms of this. Oftentimes, temporary foreign workers are coming into the immigration stream through provincial nomination programs, for example. This is an increasing source of permanent newcomers to our country. I think we just need more flexibility around the federal formulas, about whom they are going to fund or whom they are not going to fund.

•(1655)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My understanding is that once they become permanent residents through the PNP, they are eligible for the services.

Prof. John Shields: That's right. They would be, but it would be good to get a jump on this.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Sure, absolutely.

For language training, what do you think is the appropriate measure for the effectiveness, when students move to the next level, when they find employment? Can you explain that? I find that particularly in my area that's a stumbling block. People register for language training and some don't move up. They don't leave the spot and others can't come in, and it really causes a problem. What are the effective ways to continue to provide language training for those who are in need, moving them forward and/or prescribing attendance requirements or some sort of measure? How do you measure the effectiveness?

Prof. John Shields: Let me confess that I am not an expert on the language dimension of this, but I think the idea of connecting the language training increasingly with employment is a really good idea. I think, rather than just having language classes but making them more practical, more about the integration into the labour market and providing those kinds of links, maybe working with employers with that respect, is something that is going to motivate newcomers to understand and to grasp the language dimension. I think sometimes there are blockages in terms of the language because there isn't a family focus on some of these programs. Sometimes there is a—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you. I'll pass my time over to Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Ms. Buuck, you were nodding your head when my colleague was mentioning language training. That's what I wanted to ask you. Witnesses here from Reception House in the Kitchener area mentioned that they have onsite language training while they are at the particular job they have been hired for. Could you elaborate on that and what you have seen as the success for that? You mentioned that in your statement. What has been the success for that kind of program?

Ms. Christine Buuck: Number one, it's key for motivation. It's key for newcomers to secure employment as they come in along the continuum that we have talked about.

We know, though, that employment is not accessible for everyone, so we need willing employers to work with us. We've had success whereby the language training is done during the work day. The employer is willing to have an hour or two of workplace language training. It could be once a week. Of course we want more. Right on site is the most effective. I mean the newcomers will come afterwards, but it's too much.

Also it's interesting to note that more and more employers have asked to come onsite to meet and recruit a workforce. These employers are eager—yes, there is a labour shortage—to have newcomers work for them, so we are working with them to bridge the language gap.

In terms of language assessment, I would like to say that there has been a lot done over the past decade. We have a national framework, Canadian language benchmarks. They are clear assessments of the four skill areas from beginner to higher levels. On the comment about workplace integrated language, yes, we need to do much more.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there; sorry.

Mr. Tilson and Mr. Maguire.

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Buuck, on an issue you just raised, there is a company in my riding, and their whole operation is through assembly lines. They can't find people to work on the assembly lines. They have indicated that they would be prepared to hire and train newcomers to come—and this is a small community—for language training, for all kinds of things and even to assist in housing.

My question is for you and perhaps the professor from Ryerson.

Is there anything the government could do to encourage employers to get into this? After all, the government can't do everything, but are there things the government could do such as tax credits, for example? Have either of you put your minds to what the government could do to encourage employers to get more involved?

Ms. Buuck, we'll start with you.

•(1700)

Ms. Christine Buuck: Absolutely. I would say employer incentives, either in the form of tax credits or compensation. However, there are two parts to integration. One is training for the newcomer. The other is providing professional development in the workplace for workers who are receiving newcomers in the workplace.

We've done some of that as well, working with diverse groups, working in a diverse workplace, and making sure that the employer gets something out of it as well.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Shields, have you any thoughts about this?

Prof. John Shields: Yes. I agree with the comments that Christine has made.

Also, through the provincial nominee program, if you look at places like Manitoba, they've done a lot of work in this area. They've brought workers to communities and worked with employers to provide a workforce where it was very hard to recruit local people.

I think this cross-collaboration between employers and levels of government is really important. Various kinds of incentives can also be helpful in that regard. Being innovative and creative around that and giving some preference would be useful.

Mr. David Tilson: Speaking of Manitoba, I'll pass it to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks to my colleague, and thanks to both of you for your presentations today.

Ms. Buuck, right at the end of your presentation you mentioned the building entrepreneurial excellence program. I am most intrigued by the fact that you're looking at the link to work by getting them into specific language training for that occupation. Am I correct there?

Ms. Christine Buuck: Yes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: You even allow them to proceed with a level one, rather than hitting those other higher targets.

My feeling has always been that if you can get someone in there to actually do the work and it's safe, then they will learn much more quickly.

Ms. Christine Buuck: Absolutely.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can you expand on that?

Ms. Christine Buuck: As I said, it's very much a continuum. There's the integration piece but also the language piece. Literacy in level one, CLB-1, is certainly very little English. You may not have that individual right in the workplace, but you certainly would be working on vocabulary, on basic interactions that would take place in the workplace. That doesn't need to happen later on. That would be in addition to a pathway plan so that an individual.... You do that with an interpreter as well, so that someone who is coming in has someone doing one-on-one advising and providing a pathway.

I will pass it over to my colleague.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Shields.

Prof. John Shields: Yes, I'd agree with that. The more we can provide language in connection with employment and other connections with the community so that the immigrant can see the practical applications of this, the better the success rates are. Making more of those connections is important.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's an extension of what I want to ask now. You've talked about a pathway to employment as well, Ms. Buuck.

I've always talked about a pathway to permanent residency for individuals, and I am wondering if there is a connection there. Could you expand on how you yourselves, with your associates in the 13 colleges, are looking at what you think would be most valuable to make sure there is a link between the pathway to employment and a pathway to permanent residency?

Ms. Christine Buuck: That's a good question.

We've come around to this question many times. About 15 years ago, there was a project for colleges integrating immigrants to employment. A number of strides were made. The project was dropped, unfortunately.

The hallmark successes of that, though.... What's needed is credential assessment right up front. Also needed is clear communication regarding pathways. Colleges made strides in that. Another is programming directly related to the workplace. I would say that is one thing our college system is very nimble at. Our employers demand it and our economy expects it of us as well, so we have fast-track programs. I mentioned ECE programming, fast-track, community services.... The ECE graduates are now part of our child care program; these are newcomers working with newcomer children. We have fast-track programs in accounting, engineering, and many of these professions as well.

We need to make sure there's an advisement plan, there's programming and that the programming is relevant to the jobs.

• (1705)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Do you have anything to add, Mr. Shields?

Prof. John Shields: Yes, I think those are all really good suggestions.

I would say also for other immigrants or prospective immigrants, the pre-arrival services are really important. I think some of those services now are very, very targeted to specific types of occupations. They give really good information about the labour market and also about where to settle in Canada, where the jobs will be.

I also think for students, one of the good developments has been the movement towards greater access in terms of having work permits, so you have a—

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Part of the resettlement process, of course, is the pathway to employment. A lot of people run into the difficulty that they come to Canada and their credentials are not recognized here. As a result they are doing menial jobs that do not fit their training. I wonder whether or not you have any suggestions for how to break this impasse. People will say it's the professional associations themselves that need to deal with that.

If universities and other agencies were funded to do this, would there be an opportunity to properly assess the person's level of skill to match their credentials? B.C. actually has such an example for doctors. It's a six-month program where they actually go into a hospital and shadow a doctor who then can assess whether or not they meet the criteria to be a physician at that level. It's almost like a speed residency program. Once they complete it, they can make a determination of the level they're at and then they can go from there.

I'm wondering whether or not that's something that's at all feasible to do across the country. If there was funding to do this, and to do it for other professions as well, we could maximize and utilize the skills that are there.

We will start with Mr. Shields and then we'll go to Ms. Buuck.

Prof. John Shields: Yes. I think we need a lot more innovation on this level, and we need to be able to bring the employers into this and get them involved. Mentorship programs and bridge training programs are very useful, but I think a lot of the accreditation bodies are still very resistant to recognizing the skills and credentials.

I think innovations that bring such things as you mentioned there would be important. Australia does some interesting innovation around doctors serving more isolated communities, and using that to bring them into the mainstream. There are lots of different types of innovations in that regard.

I think working with the employers is often the most effective in terms of getting some recognition of the skill levels.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Ms. Buuck.

Ms. Christine Buuck: It is a very difficult question. As mentioned, the issue in many cases would be related to regulated professions and professional associations. What we find is that newcomers themselves are very creative, and we are with them. Many newcomers who are highly educated may not end up as doctors. They end up in one of our fast-track, health-related programs, as physiotherapists or nurses. It's a long road.

Civil engineers...a number of engineers who come may not end up as engineers. What they look to is a related profession. The college system has something similar to engineering, and it's a long road, close to engineering. They may not do exactly what they did in their home country, but it's closely related.

• (1710)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I was wondering whether or not institutions, universities and so on, can step up to assist with that assessment process. I'm aware of St. Paul's in Vancouver, for example, which is a teaching hospital. They can do that assessment if they're funded. When I inquired, it was going to cost \$60,000 per assessment, for six months of one individual with physician training, but they weren't funded by the province. Consequently, the program never took off. I'm saying that if it could, we could actually go a long way.

In fact, at that time, we had a situation where there was a shortage of family doctors, especially in the rural communities. We went around talking to the rural communities themselves, and they said they would welcome these newcomers to be their physicians, if they had been properly assessed.

I'm wondering whether or not there is some capacity within universities and institutions to do this work. It doesn't sound to me like there is, which is disappointing.

I'm going to focus on another issue.

Professor Shields, you talked about the issue around family, and in particular, children. In your experience with children who are integrating and resettling into Canada, and the level of challenges they face, particularly around trauma, and sometimes a latent showing of trauma, have you seen that? What are your suggestions as to how to address that issue, so that we can support children and youth?

Prof. John Shields: Yes, I think it's particularly noticeable in terms of refugees. They've often been through very traumatic experiences. I think we need more in the way of mental health supports. More supports in the school system, in terms of counselling and settlement workers, also help. Children can't be dealt with in isolation. They have to be dealt with in the family context, so it's also the parents who have to be part of that system.

To some degree, children are also very resilient. In one regard, they tend to be healthier than Canadian-born children, but they also often experience these great emotional stresses that come out of particular experiences with their migration, especially in the refugee group.

The Chair: You have three seconds.

Prof. John Shields: I think we need more supports in those areas.

The Chair: That's time.

Mr. Whalen.

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

We're getting towards the end. I might be one of the last questioners in our study on settlement services.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for the excellent testimony.

We've heard from providers right across the country: rural communities, urban centres, school boards, church groups and government-funded agencies. It's been very interesting. For anyone looking to start a settlement services agency in their community, it would provide a set of best practices and many different options on how to do it. At the same time, it's unclear the direction in which our recommendations should go, and what the federal government's role is in ensuring that communities have a path towards competing for the opportunities that immigrants provide.

I'll ask each of you to provide your thoughts on whether or not our communities should recommend ideas around best practices, whether there should be direct funding provided by the federal government, whether the federal government should provide guidelines for communities or provinces and what they should consider to be spending opportunities for them.

Let's start with you, Professor Shields.

Prof. John Shields: I think increasingly what we're seeing is a federalization of immigration, including settlement; that is, all levels of government are becoming increasingly involved in this because they all recognize the value and the importance of immigrants. I think there is the idea of co-operation among the different levels of government as funders and also as groups that are providing supports for best practices and so forth.

I think one of the best practices today is the idea of pre-arrival services because it gives immigrants much more information before they arrive. It demystifies some of the experiences they're going to have. It gives them awareness as well of some of the services that are available once they arrive within Canada. I think more information is always better.

I think the non-profit agencies are very flexible and very resilient types of organizations, and we want to ensure they can be creative. We need flexibility in terms of how they deliver and offer services. Focusing on success, rather than a strict kind of formula about what they should be doing, is the route to go.

• (1715)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Buuck.

Ms. Christine Buuck: I agree with everything that's been said.

In addition, as mentioned, is the importance of collaboration and integration in serving the whole person to make sure that projects that come forward focus on the entire family and that it really is a collaborative community model that also engages our local populations. I think that has to be key: communities that are welcoming newcomers.

The other piece mentioned was opportunities for innovation, opportunities to showcase innovation, and then have that be part of best practices. I think there's so much that's great out there that we don't know about.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If I were to summarize that, let's see if I understand it correctly. There's been a trend towards federalization of settlement services, but really, while the federal government needs to remain—

The Chair: I'm sorry, I need to interrupt you for one minute.

With the bells ringing, I just need unanimous consent to keep the meeting going. We have a 30-minute bell to go upstairs.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If I could finish my round, that would be really appreciated.

Mr. David Tilson: Let him finish, and that's it.

The Chair: Okay, thanks.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you.

To summarize, I'd say there's been a trend towards the federalization of settlement services. While the federal government should remain a partner, we need to make sure the provinces, the towns and cities, and the NGOs remain part of this so they can remain flexible and meet community needs, rather than what might be a nationally dictated need. It might not be a relevant-needs community.

I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. I'm just trying to make sure I understand you.

Ms. Christine Buuck: It's balancing the two, yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Shields.

Prof. John Shields: Yes, I agree with that. I think it is a balance.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Some of the programs we've talked about and many of the supports we've talked about for immigrant workers and refugees coming into the country seem also to me to be quite relevant for existing Canadian workers who might come from other underprivileged...or backgrounds which might represent some type of disadvantage for them. I wonder, at some point, whether or not the immigration stream is the best way to deliver things like mental health supports in schools, for instance, or career mentoring for people who come from disadvantaged or immigrant backgrounds.

Is there a way for us to work across departments, maybe with labour force development departments or with schools, to ensure that it's not just people from immigrant backgrounds who are getting access to these programs? Actually, anyone who is disadvantaged in society and who needs these supports should have mentoring, mental health counselling and whatnot.

Mr. Shields.

Prof. John Shields: I think a whole-of-society approach is a useful approach, and I agree. I think many different groups need supports. I think we do need some targeted supports, however, for newcomer populations. Many of the services that we provide are not provided through settlement services, but they're basically part of the settlement process, whether that be in the health care system, in the educational system. Often, those are not immigrant specific.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Buuck, I'm assuming you would add that language services present a specific challenge for the immigrant population.

Ms. Christine Buuck: That's correct.

As well, I would say that while working across groups, remember the unique needs of each.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I would like to thank you for your incredible contribution to our study. If you have any further thoughts, please do submit them to us in writing.

The Chair: That's very good. Thank you both.

Thank you, committee. We'll return next week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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