

Immigrant Attraction and Retention in Cochrane District

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Executive Summary

Over the past few years, reports have shown that labour shortages are expected to worsen in the Cochrane District due to an aging population, youth-out-migration, and declining birth rates (Working Together, 2014; TLIP, 2010). In these documents, attracting and retaining immigrants has been identified as an avenue through which labour market shortages can be filled.

Documenting the results of a multidimensional study of 7 key informants and 10 immigrants across three communities and four sectors (private, public, non-profit, and community), this report presents the immigration efforts underway in the Cochrane District; the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and next steps from the perspective of service providers and policymakers; and, the lived experience of immigrants who have chosen to settle in the Cochrane District.

In addition, the report has documented 8 best practices as well as 8 recommendations to fuel the immigration efforts already underway in the region. The recommendations are:

1. Tap into the existing networks of immigrants to increase newcomer engagement;
2. Continue to build relationships with employment services in urban centres to attract the right talent for jobs available in Northern Ontario;
3. Replicate the racism study conducted in 2004 to explore community perceptions and compare trends over time;
4. Involve immigrants in leadership roles associated with immigration efforts to ensure that their needs are being met;
5. Use the multicultural centre as a welcoming and social space for immigrants;
6. Use video conferencing technology such as Skype to help immigrants in rural and remote areas access services (Settlement Services/ESL) online;
7. Utilize the Timmins Public Library to host immigration-related events; and,
8. Help employers and communities become “immigrant-ready” through series of trainings, workshops, and community events.

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1.0 Introduction

Many small and rural communities in Canada are struggling to maintain their population and employment base. They are challenged by forecasts of declining populations, expected changes in the workforce, and increasing national and global pressure to stay competitive (CRRF, 2005). In response to these challenges, all levels of government in Canada are working with communities to encourage the attraction and retention of primary and secondary immigrants in order to meet labour market needs, sustain population growth, and enhance diversity. However, many communities lack the resources to be able to create strategies to successfully attract and retain immigrants. The purpose of this report is to explore the current immigration efforts in the Cochrane District. This report, and reports from three other counties participating in the project, will inform the creation of a toolkit of best practices pertaining to immigrant attraction and retention in rural areas.

This report is divided into three main sections. First, the purpose of the report, the methods employed, and the context of Cochrane District are introduced. Next, a findings section presents a SWOT analysis and next steps that emerged from the interviews with service providers and policy makers. Then, the findings from focus groups with immigrants are presented. Finally, recommendations for Cochrane District are offered.

2.0 Objectives

This study has three objectives. They are:

1. To understand immigration efforts in Cochrane District;
2. To assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) pertaining to immigration efforts in Cochrane District; and,
3. To explore the perceptions and experiences of immigrants living in Cochrane District.

3.0 Methods

The Cochrane District was selected as one of four case studies for the Rural Immigration Project led by Dr. Wayne Caldwell at the University of Guelph, which is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The goal of this project is to help rural regions across Ontario develop policies and programs in order to attract and retain immigrants. To investigate the situation in Cochrane District, the researchers used a mixed methods approach that included secondary data analysis, interviews, and focus groups. First, data from the National Household Survey (NHS, 2011) was analyzed to provide more information about immigration in the Cochrane District. Then, interviews were conducted with people who were identified as key informants. Finally, two focus groups were conducted. The first one was conducted at a local dance studio with seven immigrants. Due to difficulty recruiting for a second session, the researchers employed a virtual focus group approach. The focus group questions were sent via email to immigrants who were interested but unable to attend the in-person focus group. A total of three responses were received. The secondary analysis of NHS data is presented in the next section.

4.0 Context: Cochrane District

The Cochrane District is located in northeastern Ontario. This vast geographical area is composed of thirteen municipalities including: City of Timmins, Town of Cochrane, Town of Hearst, Town of Iroquois Falls, Town of Kapuskasing, Town of Moosonee, Town of Smooth Rock Falls, Township of Black River Matheson, Township of Fauquier-Strickland, Township of Mattice-Val Cote, Township of Moonbeam, Township of Opatatika, and Township of Val Rita-Harty (The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities [FONOM]). In Ontario, the term ‘District’ is used to describe territorial boundaries; however, it does not serve any municipal government purpose. Services in the District are either provided by the individual municipalities, local service boards, or directly by the Province (Association of Ontario Municipalities [AMO]). As of 2011, the Cochrane District had a population of 78, 645 with Timmins as its most populated municipality. English, French, and aboriginal languages such as Cree are the predominant languages spoken throughout the region (Statistics Canada, 2011).



Figure 1: Map of Cochrane District

Both the *Working Together, Local Labour Market Forecast* produced by the Far Northeast Training Board and the *Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP) Attraction, Settlement and Retention Strategy* acknowledge that labour shortages are expected to worsen in the Cochrane District due to an aging population, youth out-migration, and declining birth rates (Working Together, 2014; TLIP, 2010). Pending retirements of aging baby boomers are highlighted in the Labour Market Forecast for 2011-2031 stating that “if all of the remaining boomers retire by age 65, that means 10,675 people could exit the labour market by 2021. Another 8,420 could leave between 2021 to 2031. That's almost one third (28.5%) of the employed labour force that could potentially exit the labour market by 2031” (Working Together, 2014, p. 1). Declining birth rates in the area are acknowledged, but data is difficult to find. One outdated report stated that the birth rate for the Cochrane District has been declining since 1992 (Porcupine Health Unit, 2006). Anecdotally, youth out-migration also appears to be of concern; however, there are no concrete statistics on the migration patterns of youth. The *Local Labour Market Forecast* and TLIP’s *Attraction, Settlement and Retention Strategy* identify attracting and retaining newcomers as a potential avenue to mitigate the challenges associated with a declining population. However, census data shows a decrease in immigration to the region.

The following section further describes the composition of immigrants in the Cochrane District, as per the National Household Survey (NHS) released by Statistics Canada in 2011. Please note that the global non-response rate for the Cochrane District in the 2011 NHS was 30.3%, and this may affect the quality and accuracy of the data presented below.

Immigrants in Cochrane

The three figures below show immigration trends in the Cochrane District including the age and sex distribution of immigrants as of 2011 (Figure 2); the countries of origin of immigrants to the region (Figure 3); and, the comparison of the percentage of immigrants in Cochrane and Ontario and Canada (Figure 4).

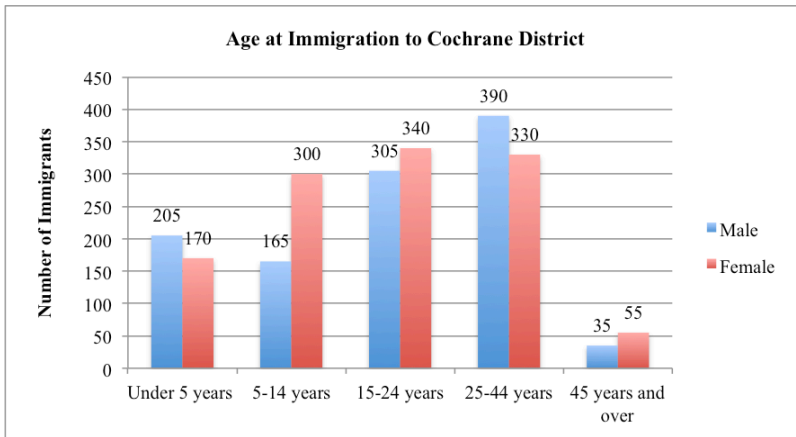


Figure 2: As of 2011, fifteen percent more males moved to Cochrane District than females within this category; however, in the 45+ category there are 36% more females than males. The least number of immigrants moving into the area is represented by the 45 years and older category.

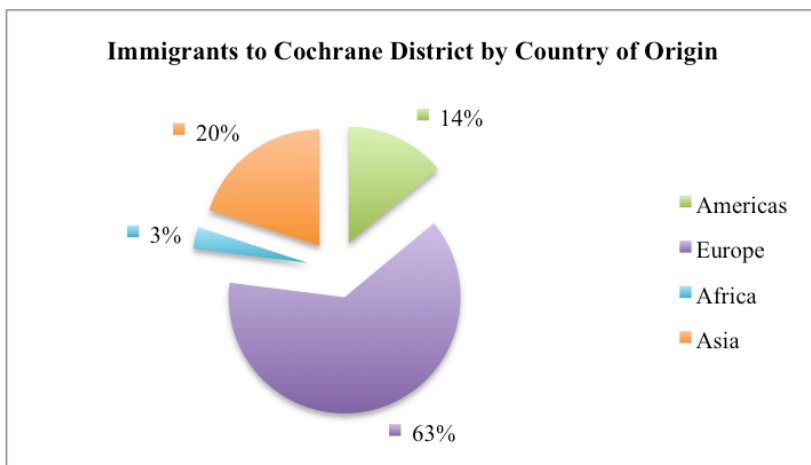


Figure 3: As of 2011, the majority of immigrants in Cochrane District emigrated from Europe and immigrants of African descent made up the minority, a 60 percent difference.

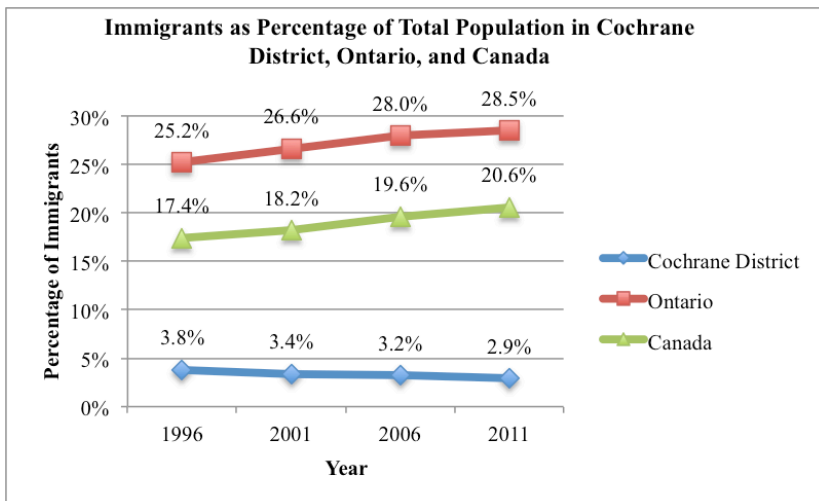


Figure 4: From 1996 to 2011, the percentage of immigrants (as a percentage of the total population) has decreased by 0.3 percent while the percentage of immigrants to Ontario and Canada has increased by approximately 3 percent each.

In summary, the percentage of immigrants (as a percentage of the total population) has decreased by 0.9% between 1996 and 2011. The majority of immigrants to Cochrane District immigrated between the ages of 15 and 45. And, the majority of immigrants to Cochrane District originate from European countries. To complement this broad picture, a table breaking down immigration by municipality is presented in Appendix A as per the 2011 NHS data by Statistics Canada. The section that follows will highlight the immigration efforts currently being undertaken in Cochrane District.

5.0 Immigration Attraction and Retention Efforts

Many immigration-related efforts are underway in the Cochrane District. In bigger centres like Timmins, immigration-related initiatives have been underway for over 5 years; whereas, smaller towns like the Town of Cochrane have become increasingly involved with immigration in the past 1-2 years. This section speaks to the various programs, projects, partnerships, policies, and events in place in the Cochrane District. Please note, this section is not intended as a comprehensive list of the efforts; rather, it attempts to paint a general portrait.

Programs¹

Key informants mentioned four key programs that have served as catalysts for the immigration efforts in the Cochrane District. The key programs are: the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP), the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre (which provides Settlement Services), the Employers' Councils, and the *Attraction and Retention Strategy*.

In 2009, the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP) was created to bring together stakeholders to discuss how immigration can benefit Timmins and what they can do to support the efforts. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) initially negotiated the contract with the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) then the TEDC hired a LIP coordinator. The TLIP served as a catalyst for immigration efforts in the region.

Concurrently, the TEDC hired Don Curry, Executive Director of the North Bay Multicultural Centre, to devise a strategy for the City of Timmins to get involved with immigrant attraction

¹ For this report, programs are defined as any planned series of events with funding for 3 or more years.

and retention. Before the attraction strategy was articulated, various goals had been accomplished which allowed Timmins to come to a point where it was ready for a strategy. These goals included: receiving funding from CIC for the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP), hiring a LIP coordinator, and forming an advisory council; launching the Timmins Immigration Portal with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration; completing a Timmins New Immigrant Profile; becoming a partner of Professions North, the Municipal Immigration Information Ontario Project, and a member of Settlement North (an organization that brings together various settlement agencies and municipal representatives); making connections with other municipalities in the North and with Interculturel Francophone du Sudbury and College Boreal; conducting diversity training workshops for employers and service organizations; and, organizing community events to raise awareness for the need for immigration. These initiatives, among others, served to ensure that employers, service providers, and the community in Timmins were ready for an immigration strategy.

Don Curry conducted a series of focus groups to consult the relevant stakeholders for the strategy so that there would be community buy-in. The focus group participants included community members, employers, service organizations, local government officials, and immigrants. Twenty recommendations were proposed in the strategy, which led to formation of the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre and Settlement Services. The recommendations continue to serve as a guide for next steps and are the inspiration for many community events regarding diversity, anti-racism, and multiculturalism.

In 2010, the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre (TDMC) opened as a Satellite Office² of the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre (NBDMC). Funding for the salaries, office space, and overhead of NBDMC and TDMC is from CIC, with additional funding from the Provincial Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade; FedNor; Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation; City of North Bay; City of Timmins; City of Temiskaming Shores; Town of Cochrane; Central Almaguin Economic Development Corporation; RBC Foundation;

² A satellite office means that the funding flows through the parent organization (the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre) and knowledge, best practices, and logistical load is shared between the two offices through e-mails and telephone calls.

Trillium Foundation; a few private donors; and, local fundraising initiatives (Curry, e-mail correspondence). As of July 2015, the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre housed 2 full-time staff members, 1 intern, 1 summer student, and had 2 areas of focus.

The two foci of the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre are Settlement Services and the TLIP. Settlement Services was created in 2010, with funding from CIC. Settlement Services is intended to help new residents navigate the Canadian immigration system. TLIP was created in 2009 and its contract was transferred from TEDC to the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre to avoid duplication. Timmins and District Multicultural Centre now provides settlement services and houses the staff of the TLIP in a central location in downtown Timmins.

At the time of this research, the TLIP had a membership of 40 people divided into two subcommittees and one advisory council: the settlement subcommittee and the welcoming subcommittee. The Settlement Committee endeavours to ensure that immigrants have access to the services they need to integrate into their communities. The Welcoming Committee organizes events like the “Welcome to Timmins Night”. The Timmins LIP has a total of 40 members, including: Multicultural Centres, TEDC, TEDC Employers’ Council, School Boards, Research organizations, Aboriginal representatives, municipal government, Social Services, community-serving organizations (YMCA, Women in Crisis), universities and colleges, Northeast Networks, Literacy network, Training Board, legal services, faith-based organizations, Newcomers Encouraging Self-Empowering in Timmins (N.E.S.T), Professions North, and Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade. Both subcommittees meet quarterly. The advisory council governs the TLIP and consists of 5 members and 2 chairs. The Advisory Council meets three times a year. Having both of these projects housed under the banner of a satellite multicultural association is a unique aspect of the immigration efforts in the Cochrane District.

Another unique aspect of the immigration efforts in the Cochrane District is that there are various Employers’ Councils in place. Building upon the success of the Employers’ Council in North Bay, the TEDC created an Employers’ Council in Timmins as a platform for employers to get together and discuss their labour market needs. The initial idea of Employers’ Councils was brought back from a conference that the Executive Director of the North Bay and District

Multicultural Centre and three members of the North Bay Newcomer Network attended in Vancouver in 2009. These Employers' Councils are considered a best practice of the Cochrane District.

Projects

In addition to the various efforts underway in Timmins, smaller centres such as the City of Temiskaming Shores, Town of Cochrane, Central Almaguin Economic Development Corporation are involved in projects³, including:

1. **The Northern Ontario Immigration Project.** Launched in 2014, this collaborative project was designed to transfer best practices from North Bay and Timmins to City of Temiskaming Shores, the Town of Cochrane and the Central Almaguin Economic Development Association. The best practices include Employers' Councils, providing HR services to employers, and creating channels whereby Settlement Services can reach newcomers. The North Bay & District Multicultural Centre is leading the project in collaboration with Economic Development Officers from three participating municipalities, the chairs of Employers' Councils, Executive Directors of settlement agencies, HR North Program Manager, and a representative from Pathways to Prosperity (to help with evaluation). This two-year project has approximately \$300,000 in funding from FedNor (Industry Canada), the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, and the three participating municipalities (Pathways to Prosperity, 2015).
2. **The HR North Project.** HR North is a "Human Resources Support Centre for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) facing labour market challenges" that can "help attract investment, students, immigrants, skilled professionals and others to Northeastern Ontario" to ensure that the right talent is in the right job at the right time (HR North, 2015). A recent partnership with Skills International has increased the capacity of HR North to facilitate the process of recruiting international talent at no cost to the employers.

³ Projects are any initiatives that are not defined as programs.

- 3. The Make Way for Youth Initiative.** Launched in 2013 by the Far Northeast Training Board (FNTB), this three-year project seeks to “prompt young people to come to the North”. Post secondary graduates (youth aged 18-35) from bigger centres, like Ottawa and Toronto, are recruited for a 7-day all expenses paid guided tour of Cochrane, Kapuskasing, and Iroquois Falls. Over the course of the week, prospective residents attend events with major employers, municipal officers, and community members that are designed to showcase career opportunities and the northern lifestyle. Additional support for the project is provided by: the Town of Cochrane, RDEE Canada, Cochrane Board of Trade, the Government of Ontario, Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board, North Claybelt, College Boreal and the Universite de Hearst.

Partnerships

The various partnerships in the Cochrane District have facilitated the immigration efforts. Some of the partnerships mentioned include: partnerships between municipalities, economic development corporations, multicultural centres, settlement services, research institutions (Reseau du Nord, Far Northeast Training Board, and Laurentian University), YMCA, ethno-cultural communities, Cochrane District Social Planning Board, Timmins Area Networking Group, Timmins Chamber of Commerce, the School Board, and local employers.

Policies

One key policy initiative underway is the welcoming policy for the City of Timmins. This initiative was championed by the TLIP, in partnership with the TEDC, the City of Timmins, and the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The first step in this policy process is becoming a signatory of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The second step is drafting a policy that is welcoming and inclusive, a policy that will state that the City of Timmins is an open, innovative community that welcomes newcomers. The City of Timmins will be one of the first cities in Northern Ontario to include such a policy.

Events

Key annual and ad-hoc events include:

1. Northeastern Ontario Immigration Symposium;
2. Welcome to Timmins Night; and,
4. International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

These events bring together community members, including immigrants, to celebrate diversity and encourage newcomer integration in the community. Refer to the dialogue boxes throughout this section for more details.

It is clear that local champions, municipalities, research institutions, and service organizations are coming together in the Cochrane District to further the cause of immigrant attraction and retention through programs, projects, partnerships, policies, and community events. It also appears that concerted efforts are made to coordinate initiatives and ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals without duplicating efforts. Key efforts are summarized as best practices on page 15 in this report.

Northeastern Ontario Immigration Symposium

In June 2015, the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP) hosted a one-day symposium to: 1) raise awareness of the need for immigration; and, 2) showcase “immigration practices, trends, resources and planning in Northeastern Ontario”. Around sixty people were in attendance at the Days Inn and Conference Centre in Timmins including: employers, service providers, government officials, economic development officers, community members, and researchers. This event was the first of its kind as it catered to an audience facing similar challenges as they try to attract and retain newcomers.

Welcome to Timmins Night

Every year for the past 22 years, service organizations in Timmins have come together to host a “Welcome to Timmins Night” for newcomers to the community. In September 2014, approximately 500 people participated in the event to welcome newcomers and get them acquainted with the various services that are offered in the community and with the community members. Historically, planning for the event has been the responsibility of the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC). Traditions will be shifted in 2015, however, as the Welcoming Committee of the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP), and the Multicultural Centre by extension, will organize the event.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD) is annually celebrated on March 21st across the world. The Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP) has created a whole project around that day, led by a subcommittee that starts planning in October. In collaboration with educational institutions, the TLIP plans events including: an anti-racism poster competition for the schools, educational presentations within classrooms, nominations for the human rights wall of fame, and general awareness raising. All events lead up to a celebration, which was held on March 25th in 2014. This initiative is intended to combat the high prevalence of racism in Northern Ontario through education (Timmins Today, 2015).

6.0 Findings: Interviews

Seven interviews were conducted in the Cochrane District with key informants involved in the immigration efforts, including: the Executive Director of the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC), the Executive Director of the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre, the Executive Director of the Far Northeast Training Board, the Coordinator of the TLIP, the Settlement Services Worker, the Chair of the Timmins Employers’ Council, and the Economic Development Officer of the Town of Cochrane. For the sake of consistency, each key informant was asked to reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to the immigrant attraction and retention efforts in the Cochrane District. Their reflections are presented in this section.

Strengths

Key informants mentioned 15 strengths, with a 100 percent of them agreeing that partnerships, projects, and events were the three key strengths. Reflecting on the strengths of the immigration efforts in the District, the key informants mentioned: the partnerships in place between various research and service organizations as well

“Our philosophy is that it doesn’t matter where people go as long as they come to Northern Ontario, whether it is Timmins or the Town of Cochrane. We work well with our partners and other communities. Whatever is good for them is good for us because there are always spin offs.”

as employers, employers’ engagement; a common understanding of the need for immigration for economic development; projects like the Northeastern Ontario Immigration Project and HR North; marketing and branding initiatives; the uniqueness of the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre; the development of an inclusiveness policy; and, the various events that are held in Timmins and District to welcome newcomers. One key informant stated: *“Given that we cover almost 15 percent of Ontario’s geographic area, we are working together on a lot of leading edge things including the Northeastern Ontario Immigration Project, Employers’ Councils, and projects with HR North, among others.”* Additional strengths include branding and marketing initiatives, the culture of knowledge sharing, and vision and strategy.

Weaknesses

The key informants reflected on some weaknesses of the immigration efforts. Considering the perspective of new residents, they mentioned lack of affordable housing and housing for rent, lack of ethno-cultural food, and lack of places of worship as three key weaknesses. From the perspective of policymakers and immigration champions, they mentioned employer engagement and immigrant engagement as challenges. In addition, they mentioned the lack of a larger English post-secondary education institution, lack of ambassador program and/or mentorship program for newcomer integration, and community resistance to change as challenges. These challenges, classified as weaknesses in this paragraph, are consistent with the weaknesses reported in the Timmins Attraction and Retention Strategy.

Opportunities

Key informants also reflected on the opportunities that can help catapult the immigration efforts in the Cochrane District. Turning a weakness into an opportunity, one key informant mentioned that the lack of affordable housing could serve as an opportunity for municipalities to launch affordable housing initiatives. Other opportunities included: job availability in the mining and forestry sectors, less competition for professional jobs than in urban centres; amenities; and, the perception of Timmins and the Cochrane District as safe, “real Canadian” communities. Lastly, the various outdoor activities and closeness to nature were mentioned as opportunities that can be leveraged to help attract and retain immigrants in the region.

Threats

Some threats that were mentioned included: community perceptions and stereotypes against visible minorities and the Aboriginal community, climate and weather, boom and bust cycles of a resource-based economy, global competition for skilled workers and professionals, remoteness and isolation of Northern Ontario, requirement of bilingualism, and lack of infrastructure for faith-based communities.

“Right now the mining industry is not hiring but in the future there is going to be a need. So, a threat is going to turn into an opportunity.”

Next Steps

The key informants were also asked to consider what the next steps are for their specific role in the immigration efforts and for the efforts at large. The following next steps were mentioned:

- Immigration Portal for Northeastern Ontario;
- Continue with the Employers’ Council and ask the employers how they are adjusting their business practices to hire new residents;
- Work towards the ultimate goals of the TLIP (helping immigrants become active citizens who are able to contribute economically and socially to Canadian society);
- Justify continued funding for Settlement Services and the Multicultural Centre to ensure sustainability;

- Create a program similar to Make Way for Youth to attract newcomers to Northern Ontario;
- Help employers and communities become “immigrant-ready” through series of trainings, workshops, and community events. Involve non-profit organizations and faith-based organizations to help shift the mindset from the bottom-up; and,
- Secure resources for ongoing marketing efforts.

Ideal Vision

To understand the immigration efforts underway and to assess consistency, the key informants were asked to articulate their ideal vision for how their immigration efforts will manifest. The common elements were community awareness, immigrant integration, and ongoing support. Capturing the immigrant integration aspect, one key informant stated: *“To me, there would be a model that is so efficient that when immigrants get off the plane they are given a list of resources (settlement agencies, health cards, driver’s license, etc.) ... are able to get a job in their field of experience and skills and they have the support systems in place. I would really love to see a streamlined integration process.”* Regarding awareness of the northern communities, another key informant stated: *“I want to see more people aware and that can only be done through marketing and promotion and through our job boards. We need immigration to support the future of employment opportunities in Timmins. What’s good for Timmins is good for the rest of the North. Wherever people come in the North, it helps the North. It is just a pleasure to see people stay in the North and to see that they like Timmins.”* Many key informants stated that they love when immigrants can share their love for Northern Ontario.

“We know that retention is social integration. If people are not socially integrated and if employers do not help socially integrate their employees, they will leave. That’s why for the prayer group it was important to move forward with that because that is really important in their culture. It’s all encompassing.”

7.0 Cochrane District's Best Practices

1. Employers' Council

In an effort to replicate the success of North Bay's Employers' Councils, the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) created the TEDC Employers' Council in 2011. The Council brings together approximately 10 members including major employers, the Far Northeast Training Board, Service Providers, and educational institutions in order to “*devise strategies on how to work together to fill labour market gaps*” (Ellis, interview). In 2014, the Northeastern Ontario Immigration Project created three Employers' Councils in the Town of Cochrane, City of Temiskaming Shores, and the Central Almaguin so that small towns can reap the benefits of collaboration. All Employers' Councils in the region meet on a quarterly basis and a chair is nominated to facilitate meetings and coordinate events.

2. Timmins and District Multicultural Centre

The Timmins and District Multicultural Centre is unique because it is a satellite office of the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre (which means that they share knowledge and resources). TDMC provides settlement services and houses the Timmins Local Immigration Partnership under one roof. This arrangement allows for easy coordination of immigration efforts.

3. Welcoming Policy of the City of Timmins

The City of Timmins is engaging in the process of drafting a welcoming policy for the municipality. By becoming a signatory of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and articulating a welcoming statement for the municipality, the City of Timmins is setting a good example for other municipalities to follow.

4. Collaborative Marketing

Northeastern Ontario created an immigration strategy for five cities (Timmins, Sault Saint Marie, Thunder Bay, North Bay, and Sudbury) to highlight the region as a whole. Marketing efforts involved having a presence at tradeshow, settlement expos, and conferences across Canada. These efforts were funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade.

5. Branding: “Timmins, I’m In.”

Timmins has a brand that they use to promote the region to tourists as well as primary and secondary immigrants. They promote employment opportunities in Timmins by connecting with employment centres in Toronto, London, and Windsor. They also advertised on Go Transit and at the airport to attract immigrants. The brand was developed with support from the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade. Paying attention to branding helps to get a clear, consistent message across to all stakeholders and it can serve multiple purposes.

6. The Northeastern Ontario Immigration Project

Launched in 2014, this collaborative project was designed to transfer best practices from North Bay and the City of Timmins to City of Temiskaming Shores, the Town of Cochrane and the Central Almaguin Economic Development Association. The best practices include Employers’ Councils, providing HR services to employers, and creating channels whereby Settlement Services can reach newcomers. The North Bay & District Multicultural Centre is leading the project in collaboration with Economic Development Officers from the three municipalities, the chairs of Employers’ Councils, Executive Directors of settlement agencies, HR North Program Manager, and a representative from Pathways to Prosperity (to help with evaluation). This two-year project has approximately \$300,000 in funding from FedNor (Industry Canada), the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation and the three participating institutions (Pathways to Prosperity, 2015).

7. The HR North Project

HR North is a Human Resources Support Centre for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) facing labour market challenges that can *“help attract investment, students, immigrants, skilled professionals and others to Northeastern Ontario”* to ensure that the right talent is in the right job at the right time (HR North, 2015). A recent partnership with Skills International has increased the capacity of HR North to facilitate the process of recruiting international talent at no cost to the employers.

8. Make Way for Youth

The Far Northeast Training Board (FNTB) launched Make Way for Youth in 2013. This three-year project seeks to showcase the North to youth (aged 18-35) through a 7-day, all-expenses-paid guided tour of the employers and the lifestyle in the Town of Cochrane, Kapuskasing, and Iroquois Falls. Although their target audience was Canadian youth (aged 18-35) with post-secondary education, the organizers found that many international students and recent immigrants jumped on the opportunity. Last year, 2 out of the 7 participants landed jobs in the region and decided to relocate. The Town of Cochrane hopes to create a similar initiative to attract newcomers in the upcoming year and this can be replicated in other areas.

8.0 Focus Groups

In order to understand the experience of immigrants in the Cochrane District, one physical and one virtual focus group were held with the assistance of the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre (TDMC). The first focus group was held on July 7th, 2015 and facilitated by Bakhtawar Khan and Brianne Labute. In attendance were seven immigrants and three employees from the TDMC. When recruiting participants it was discovered that some wanted to participate; however, their schedules did not allow them to attend. A staff member at the TDMC sent the focus group questions via email to interested immigrants and the researchers received three responses. The dialogue in the focus group was centered around the factors that attracted immigrants to the Cochrane District, the supports that helped them settle into the region, and the challenges they faced. An analysis of the data revealed the following key findings: participants were attracted to Cochrane because of employment opportunities or to join family; the city's amenities and the support from social organizations encouraged them to stay; challenges faced by immigrants were multifaceted, however, most struggled with the weather, credential recognition, and dealing with immigration processes. These findings will be elaborated upon below after a brief description of the characteristics of the participants.

About the Participants

The information presented below is from a survey the participants filled out prior to the focus group. The immigrants who participated in the focus groups were of various genders, ages, ethnic backgrounds, professional interests, and residency statuses. Ten immigrants participated in the discussions, 5 males and 5 females. It should be noted that the Cochrane District is a very large geographical area, and the immigrants represented in our focus groups all resided in Timmins. They initially immigrated to Canada from eight different countries including: South Africa, Dubai, Nigeria, Russia, Trinidad and Tobago, India, Jordan, and Egypt. The age of the participants ranged from 18-60. Their household income range was between \$30,000 and \$90,000 +. Some of their diverse professional backgrounds included Security and Surveillance, Information Technology, Medical Researcher, Medical Doctor, and Engineer. Six participants were employed in their respective professions, three were employed outside their field, and two

were unemployed. As for their immigration status, one was a temporary foreign worker, one had obtained Canadian Citizenship, and the remainder were permanent residents (PR) or in the process of becoming PRs. The various voices of these diverse participants, as captured in the focus groups, are presented below.

The Pull of Cochrane District (Attraction)

“There is something of an advantage to applying in more remote communities. The job market is nowhere near as competitive as it is in the city centres. I would have never even thought of applying for a job in Toronto or Ottawa. Don’t even bother because there are 500 candidates applying for one position. And most of them have familiarity with the Canadian system.”

Participants in the focus groups were attracted to Timmins and surrounding areas for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, a job offer was the main reason they decided to relocate. Several participants were already living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) when they moved, others were hired directly from their home countries. Other reasons for choosing Timmins were to join family or

to pursue perceived employment opportunities. There seemed to be a general perception that Northern Ontario possessed more job opportunities for immigrants, and there was less competition for those positions. One participant was offered

employment in Nunavut but felt it was too remote; Timmins was a happy medium because it had better access to other urban centres via car or flight. Interestingly, one participant planned to search for work in the north as his entry strategy into the Canadian workforce. In other incidents, participants struggled to find meaningful employment in urban centres before learning of the employment opportunities in Northern

“ I had a plan to look for work up North not in the south, that was my entry strategy because I knew that it was very competitive down south.”

Ontario. One man said, *“After 2.5 years in Mississauga, I didn’t know there was anything outside of the GTA.”* Some examples of how participants became aware of the north was through the presence of Professions North staff at networking events and through employment centres in the GTA.

Additional pull factors that attracted new immigrants to the region were the small community feel, relationship to the natural environment, schooling options for children, easy access to the airport, and access to recreational and leisure activities. All participants lived in Timmins; however, one family spent a year in South Porcupine, which they described as being more family friendly than downtown Timmins. In addition to these pull factors, there were push factors such as political and economic instability in their home countries that influenced the participants to move to Canada.

The Desire to Stay (Retention)

Several participants described their initial fear about the small size and remoteness of Timmins. This perception began to change over time and many stated the small community feel and proximity to nature as aspects of Timmins that encourage them to stay. The main factors that made new immigrants feel integrated were finding employment in their field and being immersed in the social fabric of the community.

“Timmins is a well-resourced city but there are the obvious challenges to living outside of a major centre, additional travel times and the colder climate. However these are offset by quality of life and nothing is more than 10mins away and most of it within walking distance.”

One participant felt big cities lack a sense of community due to the segregation of ethnic groups, where in Timmins there was more interaction between all immigrants regardless of ethnicity. Several participants noted their initial experience in Timmins was very isolating until they got involved in the community through volunteering or attending community events. Overall, the group felt the community was welcoming and supportive towards newcomers.

“It was a really good feeling, you feel like family.”

The other component that contributed to the social and economic integration of newcomers was the availability of services. All of the participants had engaged with the Timmins and District Multicultural Centre in some capacity. Some examples of assistance sought were support with immigration paperwork, support for an initiative, to make connections with other newcomers, or to get involved with the community. To give a specific example, the

TMDC was approached by a representative of the Muslim community for assistance establishing a prayer space. TMDC staff helped provide the necessary connections to support the Muslim community, and now the Islamic Prayer Centre is a formalized space with charitable status. A representative of the Muslim community said, *“the Coordinator at the Multicultural Centre set up a meeting with the Mayor and that got the ball rolling for the Islamic Centre”*. Newcomers also engaged in programs offered through the Public Library, Employment Options, and the Early Years Centres. One participant acknowledged that service offerings have expanded over time, *“It is good to see the impetus behind developing services for newcomers because the longer we have been here the more we see developing, which is very very encouraging to see.”* A few secondary migrants to Timmins accessed services in larger centres before relocating. Services utilized in urban centres were employment centres, an adult education centre, and a bridging program.

In addition to formal services, participants used informal avenues such as private individuals, newcomer networks, online platforms, and public spaces to support their integration journey. Participants described community members who played an informal role in providing support when they first arrived. For example, one man’s colleague helped him find a place to rent and sourced furnishings for the home. Another example shared was the local MP reviewed a permanent residency application and followed up with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure a smooth immigration process. Several of the participants mentioned a group called Newcomers Encouraging Self Empowerment in Timmins (N.E.S.T) started by a couple named Andrew and Loella. The purpose of the group is to share employment opportunities and general information about the Timmins area with newcomers. Several of the participants’ spoke of how welcomed Andrew and Loella made them feel and how they enjoyed participating in N.E.S.T events. Online platforms also played a role for many in the settlement process. For instance, some reported using Facebook pages to find out about community events and Kijiji for commerce. The final informal avenue to facilitate social integration was spending time at parks and public spaces because they provided a space to interact with other community members.

“I like it here. I used to be a city bloke, I come from Lagos 18 million people. So, now I appreciate the space Timmins offers me. There is no going back.”

Overall, most participants' felt Timmins was well resourced to support their integration journey, and, ultimately, this encouraged them to stay. Others felt Timmins lacked certain resources such as ethnic foods and places of worship. These, and other challenges, will be discussed in the next section.

Challenges

Despite a variety of challenges, many participants looked at their integration journey through a long-term lens. The in-person focus group had a desirable effect on participants. One woman expressed that she felt hopeful after listening to how fellow newcomers had overcome their challenges. Some challenges shared were universal such as adjusting to the frigid winters and hunting through local grocery stores to find foods from their homeland. Other challenges depended on individual experience. The main challenges were associated with obtaining employment, dealing with the immigration system, and the lack of amenities in smaller centres.

One woman spoke of isolation when she could not find work in her field. When her husband went to work she said, *"I started recalling my childhood and I used to cry when my mom went to office, now I was crying when he went"*. Other spouses offered a similar narrative, their partners were employed but they struggled to find opportunities for themselves. While Timmins and surrounding areas have great job opportunities in some sectors, the smaller size of the community is not conducive for all professional backgrounds. Additional factors such as credentials recognition and lack of professional networks contributed to the struggle to become economically integrated. One woman was trained as a teacher and lawyer in her home country; however, neither field recognized her credentials in Canada. Ironically, when she settled on looking for work below her credentials employers saw her as overqualified. To further the challenge, once she obtained temporary employment, employment services was no longer able to help her find work in her field, because she was employed part-time. Being unemployed or underemployed made newcomers feel undervalued. One woman said, *"I am losing time...I am willing to change fields just to contribute to society"*.

Other challenges resulted from the immigration system itself. The English language testing requirement was critiqued for its relevance to applicants coming from English speaking countries

as well as the delivery of the test. Other immigration processes were made more difficult because of the location of Timmins. Some examples were the lack of immigration lawyers or consultants in the Cochrane District and the need to get special permission from CIC to have immigration medicals done outside of Toronto.

The final challenges described are common in many remote areas. For example, there is a lack of medical specialists in the area, requiring residents with health issues to travel. Availability of housing in Timmins was also an issue for a family of four. Access to international foods was limited, particularly halal meats. Absence of places to worship was also brought out by two different participants from Islamic and Orthodox faiths, respectively. As previously mentioned the Islamic Worship Centre was recently established to serve the 25 or so Muslim families in the community. Regardless, a Muslim man shared that he struggled with the idea of raising his children in an area that did not have an Islamic School, a proper mosque, and critical mass of other Muslims.

“I like the Canadian life, it’s a different life. [I’m] proud to be a Canadian Citizen now, I’m looking forward to a better future.”

Recommendations

A couple of recommendations were gleaned from the focus group participants. First, participants described their misconceptions of Timmins including the unbearable winters, excessive bugs in the summer, lack of amenities, and the lack of infrastructure. It was recommended that those involved in promoting Northern Ontario work on debunking these stereotypes and focus on the quality of life and sense of community Timmins has to offer. The second recommendation is for the TDMC to utilize existing ethno-cultural and multicultural groups to reach out to the immigrants in order to promote programs and events.

9.0 Settlement Stories

Spotlight on John

John is an internationally educated professional who moved to Mississauga from Nigeria. He knew that the job market in bigger centres like Mississauga and Toronto was very competitive so he intended to apply for jobs in the smaller centres. In 2009, the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) was looking to recruit a qualified person to coordinate the initiative of a Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (TLIP). John applied for the position and was hired. He worked with the TLIP for four years and helped leaders in Timmins understand the varying needs of immigrants. Over the course of his time in Timmins, he became an advocate for the town because he enjoyed living in the city of Timmins and brought his family over. He now works for the Mushkegowuk Council as a Project Coordinator for Regional Economic Development but he is remembered fondly as a successful example of a newcomer who moved to Timmins in search of work related to his field and was able to successfully integrate into the community.

Spotlight on Ahmed

Ahmed moved to Toronto, Canada in 2011 from Egypt. He wrote his medical equivalency exams in Toronto. He then moved to Timmins two years after being offered a job at the Timmins and District Hospital. Being a Muslim, Ahmed was eager to find a place of worship for himself and his family. He shared that folks in the community used to pray at someone's house for the mandatory Friday prayers. In February 2015, the Timmins Islamic Centre, which has charitable status, was established with the help of the TDMC and the City of Timmins. Ahmed shared that the staff from TEDC were also helpful as they shared previous experience with establishing an Islamic Centre in North Bay. Although Ahmed has a job and support from the municipality, he feels that the sense of community and the identity that he needs and wants for his children to develop is not as easy to achieve in smaller centres like Timmins.

10.0 Recommendations

Weaving together the findings of this research, the researchers offer the following recommendations for future action based on data collected from key informants, immigrants and lessons learned from other regions.

1	Engaging newcomers was identified as a challenge. Tap into the existing networks of immigrants such as N.E.S.T and faith-based groups to reach out to immigrants, engage them in events, and support the growth of the network. The Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron has a part-time Outreach Coordinator, who is an immigrant, who ensures that immigrants are well connected to each other and able to come together for community events. In Timmins, this position could be offered to an immigrant seeking Canadian work experience.
2	Continue to build relationships with employment services in urban centres to attract the right talent for jobs available in Northern Ontario.
3	Replicate the racism study conducted in 2004 to explore community perceptions and compare trends over time. Continue anti-racism and anti-discrimination efforts like the Welcoming Policy and community education/awareness campaigns.
4	Involve immigrants in leadership roles associated with immigration efforts to ensure that their needs are being met. For instance, encourage representation from different ethnic groups on the local immigration partnership.
5	Use the multicultural centre as a welcoming space for immigrants to get together and make social connections. We have seen that having a table, a computer as a resource, culturally diverse images on the walls, and offering beverages when people come in are effective strategies for creating a welcoming atmosphere/social space.

6	Use video conferencing technology such as Skype to help immigrants in rural and remote areas access services (Settlement Services/ESL) online. Advertise this virtual support option through service providers in smaller centres. This approach has been successful in reaching out to immigrants in Lanark County.
7	The Timmins Public Library is a great community asset that should be utilized for immigration-related events.
8	Help employers and communities become “immigrant-ready”. Involve non-profit organizations in this process. For example, the Mills Community Support Centre in Almonte, Ontario partnered with the Lanark-Renfrew Local Immigration Partnership to hold a series of diversity training workshops to help create welcoming communities and workplaces by breaking down the barriers between people.

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Appendix A

Number and Percent of Immigrants in Cochrane District, Ontario, and Canada 2011					
	2011 Population	Immigrant Population	% of Immigrants	Immigrated between 2001-2005	Immigrated between 2006-2011
Timmins	42,440	1,690	4.0%	115	85
Cochrane (Town)	5,295	65	1.2%	0	0
Hearst	5,010	55	1.1%	0	0
Iroquois Falls	4,510	60	1.3%	0	0
Kapuskasung	8,065	250	3.1%	0	30
Moosonee	1,740	40	2.3%	0	0
Smooth Rock Falls	1,340	0	0.0%	0	0
Black River-Matheson	2,475	80	3.2%	0	0
Fauquier-Strickland	495	0	0.0%	0	0
Mattice-Val Cote	670	0	0.0%	0	0
Moonbeam	1,080	0	0.0%	0	0
Opasatika	170	0	0.0%	0	0
Val Rita-Harty	835	0	0.0%	0	0
Cochrane District	78,645	2,290	2.9%	165	140
Ontario	12,651,795	3,611,365	28.5%	518,405	501,060
Canada	32,852,325	6,775,765	20.0%	992,070	1,162,915

Appendix B

KEY TERMS

Immigrant: Any person who has gone through the Canadian immigration process to become a permanent resident and/or citizen of Canada. For this report, this definition includes people who have chosen to settle in Cochrane District as their initial home upon arrival in Canada (primary migrants) and people who have chosen to relocate to Cochrane District after initially living elsewhere in Canada (secondary migrants).

Immigrant Attraction and Retention: the efforts aimed at bringing immigrants into the region and encouraging them to stay.

Local Immigration Partnership (LIP): a local initiative funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to help identify gaps in service delivery for immigrants and to collaborate and coordinate services in order to fill these gaps.

Settlement Services: Settlement services are intended for immigrants to help them find their footing in new surroundings. They include, but are not limited to: help with interpreting and filling out government documents, referrals to community services, help finding jobs or training for specific jobs, and English as Second Language (ESL) classes.

English as Second Language (ESL) classes: ESL classes are for immigrants with varied levels of English in addition to their mother tongue. They can range from beginner to advanced levels, depending on the needs of the immigrant.

Policy Makers: For this research, policy makers are defined as any individuals who are affiliated with the government and can influence the policy-making or program implementation process.

Service Providers: For this research, service providers are defined as individuals or organizations that provide social, financial, or advocacy services and/or support for immigrants. These include organizations whose mandate is specific to immigrants and whose mandate encompasses all people, including immigrants.

Note: These definitions are not universal; they are specific to this report.