



**A joint project of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa
and Local Agencies Serving Immigrants**

An Exploratory Overview of the Assets of Immigrant and Visible Minority Communities in Ottawa

October 2004

FINANCED BY UNITED WAY / CENTRAIDE OTTAWA



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I. Executive Summary

This report is the result of a study of existing assets of immigrant and visible minority communities in Ottawa. The purpose of the study is to improve dialogue within these communities and improve community participation in the development of public policy. Assets studied include housing, employment and income, access to services and advocacy with the view to understanding how these assets were developed and how they can be enhanced. Three focus groups were used to develop a survey that was distributed to communities serving immigrants and visible minorities. The project resulted in an on-line directory of these organizations.¹

General Assets

Faith based organizations were most frequently listed as assets. Since there are no geographically defined neighbourhoods where people of common background congregate in Ottawa, faith based organizations provide places for people to connect and build social capital. Other assets include services and facilities that are available to the general public. The great diversity of assets within community organizations points to the fact that immigrants are a diverse group that know best how to deal with their particular issues. However, the sharing of strategies is a powerful tool that can help communities learn from each other and take action to move forward.

Volunteers were listed by one quarter of those surveyed as a major asset and almost half of the organizations used volunteers. Good financial support was another important factor. Over 50% received grants from one of more levels of government. Space to work, particularly free space, was also mentioned. Networking and partnerships with organizations was important to one fifth of the respondents; and one third of the organizations surveyed participate in one or more networks. Existing agencies play a pivotal role in assisting in the creation of new groups that respond to emerging needs. Two thirds of the organizations have membership lists that range from 100 to 500. The most popular means of communication with members was by “word of mouth” and community newspapers. Other means are via newsletters, radio, TV and bulletin boards.

Challenges Identified with respect to Assets

Financial and staffing: 30% of respondents relied on membership dues and fundraising with no government support. Two thirds need adequate and stable support, specifically government support, to carry on their work and to maintain their staff. Strategies to obtain charitable status need to be developed.

More community involvement : 12% identified the need to expand the involvement of the broader community and 12% need more volunteers.

¹ See www.spcottawa.on.ca/bok. Select “Diversity” on the left hand side. On the next screen choose “Connecting with Others”. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on “Directory of Organizations Serving Immigrant and Visible Minority Residents”.

Building Assets to Bridge the Challenges: The study identified a vibrant and significant infrastructure of community resources that address a broad range of issues; but it also points to the fragility of these infrastructures. Adequate funding and improved ways of working together is needed to strengthen these resources. This can be done by building communication networks, enhancing information sharing, encouraging skill development, improving access to space and gaining a better understanding of the distinctive nature of these groups. As well, organizations need to work with the City to create strategies to implement the Ottawa 20/20 Growth Plans, particularly the Human Services Plan which aims at enhancing the existing assets of various community groups.

Priority Issues:

Employment and Income: Many immigrants face barriers entering the workforce or work in jobs that under utilize their skills. Many immigrants have average incomes lower than the general population which results in higher rates of poverty. Many communities help their members by providing employment and helping them get established. The voluntary (non-profit) sector offers opportunities for gaining experience that can lead to employment. There is a need to identify the reasons why more immigrants and visible minorities are not employed within this sector. The 2001 census points to the fact that immigrants are more likely to be self-employed than Canadian-born workers. Support to assist immigrants to develop small businesses needs to be expanded.

Housing, Access: Many immigrants find suitable housing while others face challenges in finding adequate housing. A number of initiatives are listed by which groups obtain or keep appropriate housing. One method is through lending circles. Survey participants identified the possibility of using community financial and land resources to build affordable housing i.e. faith-based assets and ethnic specific financial institutions. A new network to address the housing needs of immigrants should be developed.

Access to Services and Advocacy: Many immigrants do not have adequate information about available services and how they can take advantage of services. The diversity within the immigrant and visible minority population means there is no one solution that fits all. Services unique to particular groups as well as mainstream services available to the general public were mentioned as assets, although barriers to accessing mainstream services is a concern. There is a need to increase resources for cross cultural education and cultural competency training in existing services and government departments. Newer immigrant groups and Francophone visible minorities face additional challenges in meeting their needs.

Effective advocacy on policy discussions affecting these groups needs to be developed. Rules relating to charitable status created barriers to the ability of nonprofit agencies to fulfill their advocacy role and are currently being changed. Leaders who speak on behalf of their communities can influence public policy that affects community infrastructure.

Recommendations

Provide stable funding base and increase access to affordable or free space.

Improve information sharing, networking, knowledge about the distinctiveness of groups, and planning and consultation models.

Support community assets with respect to employment and income, housing, services and advocacy.

II. Introduction

1. History of the Project

Context

The Ottawa Mosaic is collaboration between Local Agencies Serving Immigrants (LASI) and the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPC), along with other community partners, to build the capacities of immigrant and visible minority communities in Ottawa.

In April 2002, the Ottawa Mosaic held a Conference that brought together over 200 people to discuss the “Building of the Mosaic” in Ottawa. The Conference Report of the Mosaic² recommended that approaches be fostered and solutions developed to address difficulties in four priority areas housing, employment and income, access to services and advocacy. It recommends that if the Building of the Mosaic is going to be realized, levels of government and community need to collaborate and address the identified gaps.

Following the Conference, the Ottawa Mosaic received funding from the United Way of Ottawa to develop an inventory of existing assets, to identify approaches to improve communication and dialogue within the immigrant and ethnic communities, and to explore ways of improving community participation in public policy by helping community members develop a stronger voice.

The rationale for the development of this inventory of assets is that numerous studies on immigrants and visible minority groups are already widely available which identify numerous barriers to full participation of immigrant and visible minority community members in Ottawa. However, despite the difficulties, immigrant and visible minority communities settle successfully in Ottawa and continue to cope with difficulties, through various resources and initiatives to support one another. Ottawa has currently 300 ethnic associations listed from over 60 ethnic groups (City of Ottawa 2002), which attests to the dynamism of the diverse communities in Ottawa.

This report looks at the communities, not from the perspective of problems, needs and gaps, but from the perspective of their resilience and creativity in establishing themselves. We explore the assets and strengths immigrant and visible minority communities have built for themselves, how they have accomplished this, and what would help sustain and enhance these assets.

2. An Asset Based Approach

Asset based community development was advanced by the Americans John McKnight and John Kretzman in the early nineties. It refers to an approach that values the local resources, capacities, experiences, and strengths that people have and use to build their own communities, instead of focusing on a community’s needs and problems. (Kretzman and McKnight 1994). These assets form the foundation for local development, by fostering connections between them which multiply their effectiveness and engaging their resources to improve conditions within the community.

² Local Agencies Serving Immigrants and the Social Planning Council of Ottawa. Building the Ottawa Mosaic Summary Report Conference on Issues Regarding Ethno-cultural Minorities in Ottawa. Ottawa: SPC, 2002; available at http://canada.metropolis.net/research-policy/cities/urban_roundtable/ FINALREPORT_EN_September30.doc

Asset based community development and asset mapping have been developed to be used in relation to a geographic community (for example, a neighbourhood) In this project, it was necessary to adapt the tools of asset mapping to gather information on demographically defined communities who are dispersed geographically across the City.

This report is based on the information provided by participants in the research. It does not purport to provide an exhaustive list of the assets, but instead provides a snapshot of the range of assets across diverse communities and describes strategies for enhancing those assets.³

3. Methodology

The project began with three focus groups. The input from these focus groups was used to develop a survey, which was distributed to formal and informal groups in the community serving immigrant and visible minority community members. 96 responses were received. The survey was followed with key informant interviews, to further explore themes raised by the focus groups or survey and to get more information on assets of these communities. Simultaneously with these three processes, the project coordinator conducted a review of existing research on immigrant communities in Ottawa. The report draws upon the findings of these existing reports, as well as the information gleaned from participants in the research process. For more details on the methodology, please see Appendix 1.

Throughout the report we highlight certain examples of success stories (a community's view of a "best practice"). The particular examples profiled in this report are only a very small sampling of successes or 'best practices' in Ottawa. The examples are in no way a comprehensive listing, and do not in any way reflect a ranking by participants. The specific examples were selected to highlight diverse strategies used to address the key issues in the research (housing, access to services and employment, communications, and advocacy).

4. The Focus of the Project : Understanding the Terms " Immigrants" and "Visible Minorities"

It is well understood that Ottawa is becoming an increasingly diverse City. The 2002 Building the Ottawa Mosaic Conference highlighted the need to focus on the strengths and assets of these diverse residents, but also clarified that there are many different ways in which these residents describe themselves and are described by others. In this project, we use the terms "immigrant", "recent immigrant" and "visible minority", because these are terms used by Statistics Canada, which is the source of statistics used here.

³ The on-line inventory which has been created as part of this project lists those organizations which responded to the survey and which consented to being included in the directory. This is estimated to represent roughly one third of the community organizations in the City serving immigrant and visible minority community members. The on-line inventory has been designed so that organizations can add themselves to the listings. See www.spcottawa.on.ca/bok. Click on "Diversity" at the left. Click on "Connecting with Others" and scroll to the bottom of the page. Click on "Directory of Organizations Serving Immigrant and Visible Minority Residents".

The project was intended particularly to highlight the strengths and assets of immigrants and their communities. An immigrant is a foreign-born individual who has come to Canada, and who now or once was a “landed immigrant” (i.e. has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities). There are 166,745 foreign-born residents in Ottawa, representing 21.8 percent of the Ottawa population. A large majority of immigrants in Ottawa are Canadian citizens (75%). A recent immigrant is someone who came to Canada during the 1991 – 2001 decade.⁴

Ottawa’s immigrant population is very diverse in many respects, including cultural background, ethnicity, language, circumstance of arrival, socio-economic status both in their countries of origin and in Canada and time spent in Canada. It is therefore misleading to address immigrants as one homogeneous group.⁵ We stress throughout the project that the diversity within Ottawa’s immigrant community is central.

From the start, the project also looked at the strengths and assets of visible minority community members in Ottawa. A visible minority person is a person, other than Aboriginal peoples, who is non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. It is important to note that approximately one-third (31 percent) of the members of Ottawa’s visible minority groups is born in Canada. Often in popular discourse visible minority community members are considered immigrants and immigrants are assumed to be visible minority residents. This is an erroneous perception. Visible minority populations have had a long history in Canada and thus it is inappropriate to perceive them as ‘immigrant communities’.⁶

However, in Ottawa there is significant overlap between Ottawa’s visible minority and immigrant groups. Members of visible minority groups are largely immigrants (66%) and more than one half of all immigrants living in Ottawa are members of Ottawa’s visible minority communities.⁷ This project explored the assets of groups which defined themselves as visible minorities, because of the significant overlap in Ottawa between visible minority and immigrant groups, and because of the commonality of some concerns (for example, stereotyping, discrimination, etc.).

In a few cases, we have included organizational assets which serve residents who are not members of immigrant or visible minorities communities (for example, they define themselves based on religious or ethnic identity). These were included for the same reason that some mainstream organizations were included, specifically because members of immigrant or visible minority communities identified them as relevant within the context of assets which are meaningful.

⁴ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. *Immigrants In Ottawa: Socio-cultural Composition and Socio-Economic Conditions*. Ottawa: Social Planning Council of Ottawa, December 2004.

⁵ SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, *ibid*.

⁶ SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, *ibid*. Such perception would lead to an exclusionary social behavior that relates Canadian identity to one’s skin colour. For example, it is important to note that the term “minority” (whether visible minority, religious minority, ethnic minority, etc.) carries connotations which can be considered pejorative.

⁷ SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, *ibid*.

5. The Structure of This Report

This report summarizes the research undertaken in the asset mapping project. There are three primary sections to this report:

- Section III "General Assets in Ottawa's Immigrant and Visible Minority Communities" starts with a summary of general assets within immigrant communities overall. This is followed by an explanation of the challenges to those assets which were identified during the research, for example conditions which are negatively affecting the assets or which work against the assets having a greater benefit for the community. The section ends with some suggestions on what could be done to strengthen the assets.
- Section IV focuses on the four priority areas identified in the 2002 Building the Ottawa Mosaic Conference: employment and income; housing; access to services and advocacy. For each priority area, the report provides a very brief summary of the assets within immigrant and visible minority communities related to these issues, the challenges identified in relation to those assets, and suggestions to address the challenges.
- Section V provides a brief conclusion, and brings together all the recommendations listed throughout the report.

As well, the project has created an on-line directory of organizations serving immigrant and visible minority community members (based on survey responses). The directory is available at www.spcottawa.on.ca/bok (Select "Diversity" at the left; then "Connecting with Others", then "Directory of Organizations Serving Immigrant and Visible Minority Residents".)

III. General Assets in Ottawa's Immigrant and Visible Minority Communities

1. Assets Identified

Ten Categories of Assets Identified

Survey participants were asked to identify five valuable assets in their particular community. The assets which they identified⁸ fell into ten categories (listed according to the number of times they were mentioned, beginning with the most frequent) :

- a) Faith based organizations (temples, mosques, pagodas, churches, etc.)
- b) Gathering places (e.g. community centres) and information networks
- c) Associations and organizations
- d) Specific social service programs
- e) Specific businesses
- f) Specific people who play a leadership role in the community
- g) Volunteers, including students
- h) Cultural or religious festivals or events
- i) Skill level of the group
- j) Funders

From the more long-standing communities to the more recently arrived, a pattern of asset building emerged. When immigrants of a particular background settle in Ottawa, they naturally look for one another and establish supports to help each other meet the basic needs of food and shelter and settlement. Over time, they form associations to preserve their own cultural traditions, dances, music, arts, spiritual practices. They build churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples to create their own spaces for spiritual and care-giving activities in their traditional cultural ways. They begin to establish other structures to address additional issues family and economic issues, culture and language, care of vulnerable community members, culturally appropriate services and businesses, advocacy resources etc. An infrastructure of formal and informal initiatives is developed. As they establish these assets, they pass on to new communities their experience and their support. The asset mapping identified a very broad infrastructure of formal and informal initiatives, addressing diverse issues and the needs of diverse communities. This list represents what elements could be built upon in any community to improve quality of life.⁹

It is of particular note that faith based organizations were mentioned most frequently as assets. Faith communities play a pivotal role in all aspects of community life for many immigrant groups, serving as a focal point for community identity and gathering. It is

⁸ The list of assets was used to expand the distribution list for the survey. The organizations listed initially in the on-line directory are those who responded to the survey **and** consented to being included in the directory.

⁹ This project is an overview. It is beyond the scope of this project to assess the full range of supports within distinct immigrant groups. An asset mapping for each of the many distinct immigrant and visible minority groups in Ottawa is a separate project which would require substantially more resources and a different methodology.

essential, in any asset based approach, and indeed most community development initiatives, that the relevant faith based organizations are engaged in a meaningful way.

A notable example of a particular faith based asset in Ottawa is the Multifaith Housing Initiative, described in Appendix 3.

Related to this is the importance of cultural or religious festivals. In answer to another question, 35% of survey respondents identified they provide cultural or religious festivals or activities. Such activities are particularly important in a city such as Ottawa where there is not a strong pattern of significant geographically defined neighbourhoods where people of a common background congregate (sometimes called “ethnic enclaves or clusters”.) Cultural and religious activities provide an opportunity for community members dispersed throughout the City to connect with each other.

A Vibrant and Diverse Collection of Community Organizations

The results from the asset survey provide a snapshot of a vibrant and diverse collection of community organizations addressing a wide variety of issues, using differing strategies, to improve the quality of life of their members and, in many cases, of the broader community.

The organizations which responded to the survey reflect and serve a broad cross section of the distinct communities making up Ottawa’s immigrant population. For example, language spoken is one dimension of diversity, with immigrants in Ottawa speaking seventy languages.¹⁰ Survey respondents indicated they provide services in a total of 21 specific languages, with an additional 10 respondents indicating they provided services in up to 60 unspecified languages.

All survey respondents were part of the voluntary (i.e. non-profit) sector, and reflect the great diversity within the voluntary sector. The sample includes large formal organizations with budgets of over a million dollars per year, to small informal organizations with no cash budget at all.

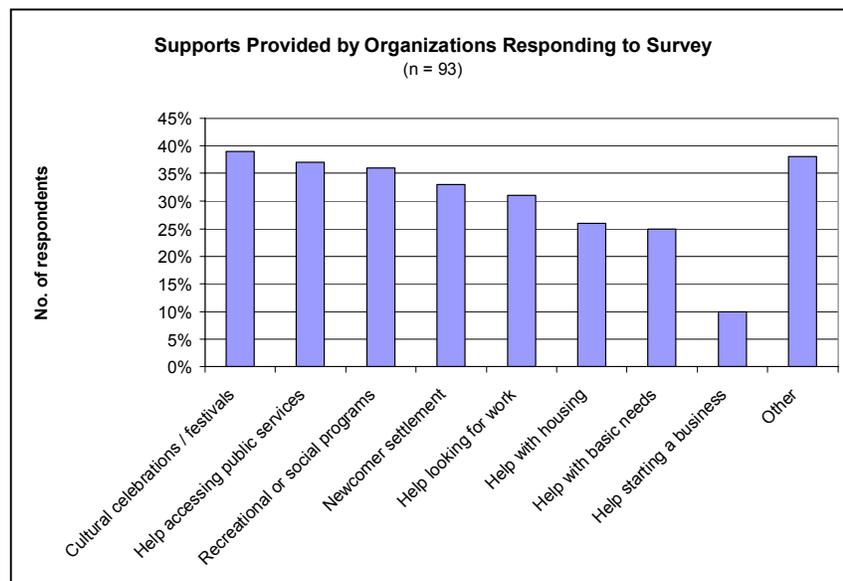
Just over half of the organizations which responded had a mandate which was specific to a particular population of immigrant or visible minority community members. Many other respondents to the survey were organizations intended to serve the general community but were identified as an asset for immigrant and visible minority community members. As well, there was representation within the sample of organizations addressing the particular needs of women, youth or seniors. Many respondents identified that one of the most important elements in their ability to do their work was the language capacity of their staff.

¹⁰ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. Immigration, Ethnicity, and Languages in Ottawa: Fast Facts from the 2001 Census. Ottawa: Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2003.

Previous consultation processes in the City have identified that accommodating the needs of immigrant and visible minority community members needs to be part of the design of mainstream services.¹¹ The fact that many of the community assets identified were services or facilities intended for the general population highlights the fact that many mainstream services have implemented practices so they are more accessible to diverse members of the community. While there is considerable work yet to be done in this regard (see the section on Access to Services), the survey results, the focus groups and the key informant interviews identify that there has been substantial progress in recent years.

The organizations that responded are addressing issues along the full spectrum of intervention: information sharing, delivering programs, individual and community capacity building, individual and policy related advocacy, cultural activities and research. Further, the organizations which responded to the survey are undertaking activity along a broad spectrum of issues, including the priority areas identified by The Ottawa Mosaic. The chart below shows the range of issues in which survey respondents are involved, by the percentage of respondents.

The great diversity within these organizations is a significant asset for a variety of reasons. As the survey reveals, immigrant and visible minority community members, through their organizations, are active in addressing the full range of issues which are central to the quality life of immigrant and visible minority community members and are using the full spectrum of strategies.



This breadth of collective experience is a central element in asset based community development, social capital strategies, and most recently in recommendations for alternative social planning.¹² Each of these processes is based on an assumption that communities know best how to deal with their issues, that sharing of strategies is a powerful tool for building the capacity of communities to take action, and that effective change is most likely when communities are given adequate supports to enable them to act on their particular concern and share among groups their collective understanding. The box on the next page at the right lists some of the lessons which survey participants

¹¹ Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Priority on People Consultations on Ottawa's Draft Human Services Plan January and February 2003 Summary Report, page 16.

¹² See: Chatterjee, Alina et al, Alternative Social Planning: A Paradigm Shift Developing an Inclusive, Healthy Toronto. Toronto: Alternative Planning Group, Feb. 2004, page 4.

indicated others could learn from their experience. It demonstrates the extensive experience which could be harnessed to build the capacity of the community organizations. Further, the fact that over 30% of respondents indicated they offered supports related to the key issues identified from the Conference (housing, employment / income, access to services) indicates there is a strong potential base for moving forward on these issues.

Volunteers

Volunteers were identified as a major asset within the organizations. Over one quarter of those surveyed identified their volunteers as one of the two most important things which have helped their association in its' activities.

Almost one half of the organizations were using volunteers. The scale with respect to volunteer involvement varied greatly. Of those organizations using volunteers, 5% had 9 or fewer, roughly 40% had between 10 – 99, and 16% had 100 or more volunteers. Although we do not know from the survey the level of activity of the volunteers, comments on the survey indicate their contribution runs the full gamut of tasks. Some organizations identified they were wholly run by volunteers. Others have paid staff complemented by volunteer involvement.

Information from the survey and the focus groups indicate that there is a very talented pool of volunteers working in these organizations. Respondents identified a wide range of skills which their volunteers bring – management, accounting, research, and much more. This is a tremendous asset to the organizations.

Financial Support

Good financial support was another factor identified as among the most important things which had helped organizations in their work. The importance of adequate financial supports was echoed in the key informant interviews and the literature review. This is

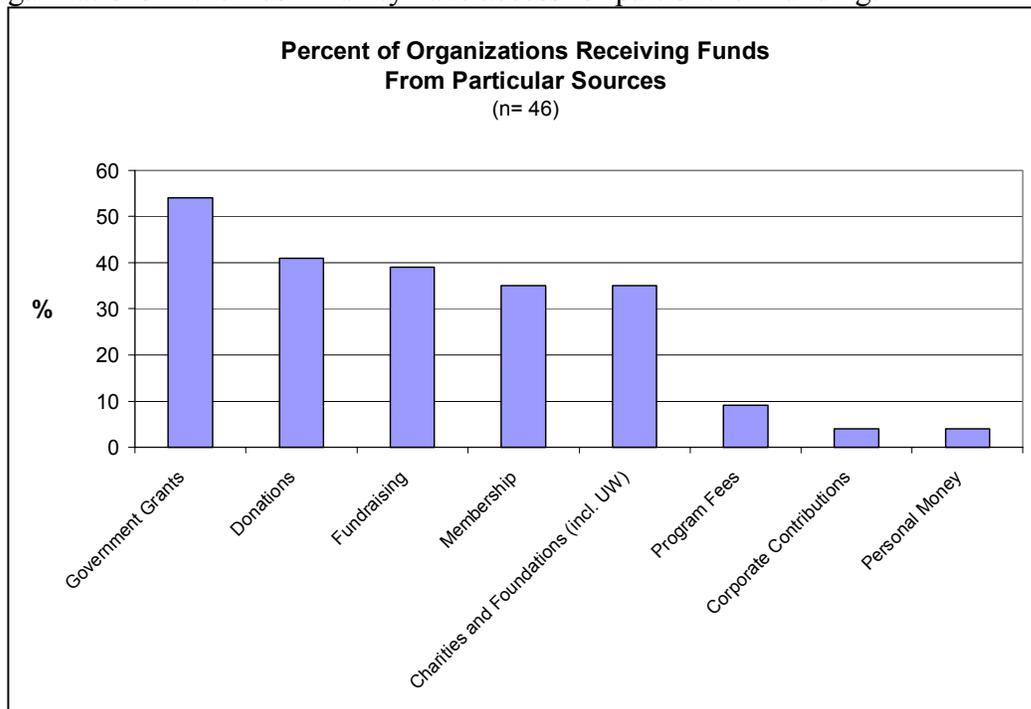
In your opinion, what could other groups learn from your experience?

- take things step by step; have a good business plan
- learn first about other services, to ensure programs enhance not duplicate what is already available
- how to motivate ethnic/multicultural groups
- meet the community up close, one by one to know their problems; build community capacity; empower them to own their issues
- how to establish partnerships with various sectors of civil society
- adaptability; keep looking at larger picture
- apply for funding, develop solid programming and responsive quality services
- have to build trust before community members begin to participate actively, to take on responsibility.
- Fewer but more focussed, effective programs
- the ability to engage volunteers to contribute time for their community
- the importance of combining research and programming.
- hard work, perseverance and dedicated staff
- listen to the community's needs, research the possibilities, network at all stages
- our effective service delivery model

not to say that organizations across the sector indicated they had adequate financial support (see the section on Challenges), but rather, that funding was a critical element in the success of the work of certain organizations.

The chart below summarizes the responses of those who provided specific information on their funding situation. Over 50% were receiving or had received a grant from one or more of the three levels of government. In some cases these were one time small grants. In other cases, the organization was receiving regular funding for a service. One third were receiving or had received funding from a foundation, charity or United Way.

Some of the longer established communities (e.g. the Chinese, Italian and Jewish communities) have private foundations or community fundraising structures to which organizations in their community have access for part of their funding.



Space

Space was identified as an important asset in helping groups in their work, particularly free space to work or meet. Over half of the responding organizations stated they had a main place for their programs and activities.¹³ Several were located in a municipal community centre or community health and resource centre. A few groups had space which they could share with other organizations. Of particular note was the number of groups who used faith based spaces for their activities.

¹³ This partially reflects the fact that it was much easier to connect with and get a response from organizations which had a stable address. Of the original outreach list for the survey, 56% of the organizations were using a member's home address for the address of the association. This situation leads to constant changes in the contact information for groups, which was a challenge for this project, but more importantly, makes networking difficult.

Networking and Partnerships

One fifth of respondents indicated that partnerships with organizations was one of the most important things which had helped their organization in its' activities. Several participants in the research identified they were receiving help from a more established organization and this was helpful for them. In other cases, organizations were co-operating on infrastructure (sharing space or other resources) or on programming. Some respondents indicated they had some resources they would be willing to share, most notably space and expertise.

Of particular note with respect to help from more established organizations was the fact that, on a separate question, half of those who described their origins had been started through the assistance and support of an existing group or through a formal planning process. There is an anecdotal sense that immigrant and visible minority serving groups and organizations spring up spontaneously in response to common concerns. The survey points to the reality that in Ottawa, new groups are started through both the spontaneous activity of the community and through the leadership of existing organizations. The organizations most commonly mentioned as having helped new groups get started are agencies who have a mandate or a program component to support community development and networking. Hence, the on-going capacity of existing agencies to continue to undertake community development and capacity building is an important asset with respect to the creation of new groups which can respond to emerging needs.

Equally significant is the fact that 30% of respondents indicated their organization had helped other organizations in the community get started. Each had helped, on average, three other groups, indicating that the work of voluntary sector organizations has a multiplier effect in the community, through mutual assistance to other community projects and the additional contribution of the organizations' volunteers.

One third of all respondents stated they participate in networks, with almost half of those participating in more than one network. Some of the 29 networks they participant in (see Appendix 2) serve specifically immigrant or visible minority groups. Others are related to a field of service.¹⁴

Members

Many of the organizations who responded to the survey have a membership base. The number of members ranges from under ten for some organizations to several hundred for others. One third of those who specified the number of members had up to 100 and another third had from 100 to 500 members. The research did not explore the capacity for nor the means by which individual organizations relate to and involve their members. However, it is clear that in many cases members play a significant role in the delivery of programs (i.e. the members and the volunteers commonly overlap). Further, this network of members represents an extensive infrastructure which has considerable potential for information dissemination to individual community members dispersed throughout Ottawa.

¹⁴ Respondents also identified networks they know of but do not participate in, for example business associations, provincial networks, etc. These are not listed in the asset list, unless at least one member from that group participated in the research in some way.

Communications

The research explored the most popular ways in which community members exchange information. The two most popular means were word of mouth and community newspapers, including ethnic specific newspapers and neighbourhood newspapers. In Ottawa, there are several dozen newspapers available in languages other than English or French, including at least five daily newspapers. They are an important resource for community members to network and to understand the issues of the day in their own language.

Closely related to the community papers, and also identified as important were community newsletters (i.e. less formal publications put out by a particular organization). The internet, including e-mail distribution, was identified next, followed by Community Radio and Community TV.

Bulletin boards (for example in a store) were the final means of information sharing which was identified a significant number of times. Participants identified the importance of local businesses which serve as places for community members to make connections, or which post community information. As well, such local businesses are common distribution points for community papers.

2. Challenges Identified With Respect to the Assets

Funding and Staffing

Of note is that 30% of those who answered the question on sources of revenue were relying only on membership, donations, fundraising or the personal funds of members, i.e. they received no support from the governmental, philanthropic or corporate sectors. Some organizations, for a variety of reasons, choose not to solicit funds from government, foundations or corporations. One common reason is they feel they have more independence in their work if they are not tied to the priorities of outside funders. Further, within many of the communities there is a strong tradition and culture of voluntary service and charitable acts which leads to the establishment of organizations intended to be resourced through the charity of the community.

However, a closer analysis reveals that in most cases the high dependence on membership, donation and fundraising would not appear to be a dependence of choice. Two thirds of those who identified the most important thing they needed to continue their work identified the need for adequate funding, many specifying the need for government funding. As well, many organizations indicated they had sought funding from governments and other funders and had been unsuccessful.

This reflects what was raised in the focus groups, the key informant interviews and in many other forums¹⁵. Participants identified many aspects of “adequate” funding,

¹⁵ Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Everything You Wanted to Know About Funding Diversification and Program Evaluation But Were Afraid To Ask 2003 Annual Consultation. Ottawa: Social Planning Council of Ottawa, November 2003; and Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Funding Our Future A Community Consultation on the Voluntary

including:

- the amount
- the stability and predictability (the need for core as well as project funding)
- the need for funding for successful on-going programs as well as pilot programs
- less onerous administration requirements.

Many organizations identified they needed the funding in order to pay for staff. The challenge of adequate and appropriate funding, and its' impact on staffing, is a crisis throughout the voluntary sector.¹⁶ Strategies to address these problems across the voluntary sector would be of benefit to organizations serving immigrant and visible minority community members. In the focus groups and key informant interviews, however, there was a sense that organizations serving immigrant and visible minority populations are particularly disadvantaged within the voluntary sector, specifically, that they may be more poorly funded than other voluntary sector organizations (e.g. lower average wage levels, etc.). While this could not be confirmed or refuted within this research, the study did identify some particular challenges with respect to funding. Many participants in the research identified that some immigrant serving organizations (particularly smaller groups) are losing out in the competitive grant-writing processes. This had been raised in other consultation processes, notably the consultation on the draft Human Services Plan. While a service may be needed based on documented community need, an individual group may not have the skills or resources to be successful within a competitive funding framework.

This whole problem with respect to funding points to the need on the one hand for short term supports to help groups compete for available funding. More fundamentally, it points to the need for adequate and stable funding to meet identified needs in the community, irrespective of the skills of grant writers within the sector. For example, a suggestion was made for an information structure where groups could "post" project ideas which anyone could then advance (e.g. other groups could develop or funders could be proactive in initiating).

In the focus group on access to services, participants recommended that incorporated non-profits with charitable status need to help small groups to attain charitable status and in the interim, need to partner so that small groups can access funding which requires an organization be incorporated or a registered charity. This would resolve some of the difficulties that ethnocultural communities face in accessing charitable status.¹⁷ Participants said that policies, regulations, and strategies need to be developed that

Sector in Ottawa. Ottawa: Social Planning Council of Ottawa, November 2004, and Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Consultation on the Human Services Plan, *ibid*.

¹⁶ See: Canadian Council on Social Development, *Funding Matters*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2003.

¹⁷ For an explanation of some of the challenges see Rashmi Luther. *Ethnocultural / Ethnoracial Advocacy Groups, State Funding and Charitable Tax Status*. Ottawa: Carleton University, October 2001, and Rashmi Luther, *Advocacy Matters Reviving and Sustaining community Advocacy networks to support Multiculturalism and anti-racism in the Ottawa region*. Ottawa: The Community Advocacy Action Committee on Access and Equity, November 2003., and Tendaie Musoczi Marowa. *How the Law Of Charities and Advocacy Can be Changed to Better Serve Immigrants and Refugees*. Toronto: Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Sept. 2001.

address the lack of opportunities to get charitable status and the lack of understanding of the processes of getting charitable status. Recently, the Canada Revenue Agency has begun to address some of these problems with the release of administrative guidance such as “Applicants Assisting Ethnocultural Communities” and “Guidelines for Registering a Charity: Meeting the Public Benefit Test”.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this information is not as readily available as it needs to be. Further, there is little or no assistance available for groups that need help drafting their objects or preparing the supplementary materials needed to establish that the group’s purposes and activities are both charitable and established for the benefit of the public. For existing charities that want to work with or mentor groups without charitable status, considerable confusion remains about what activities will jeopardize their charitable status.

Some respondents identified the need for corporate partnerships or sponsorships, and perhaps strategies for attracting the involvement of corporations.¹⁹ Within the survey sample, however, respondents indicated very little concrete support from corporations. In fact, there were just as many organizations relying solely on personal funds of members as were receiving corporate contributions. This indicates either the need for leadership and capacity building to promote contributions from corporations for immigrant or visible minority serving groups, or an assessment to determine whether pursuing corporate support is a realistic strategy for resourcing these organizations.

Space

Following funding, the most commonly identified need (by 19% of respondents) related to space for meetings, operations, and special events. Most were in need of free space. A small number needed affordable or permanent space. Organizations without stable space for their activities often have great difficulty with continuity as it can be difficult for their members, volunteers and program users to keep in contact and involved with them.

More Involvement From the Community

15% of respondents identified a need for more or broader involvement from the community. This points to the need for resources on the one hand, and possibly capacity building on the other (information and training on community development, community engagement tools) to assist organizations in building broader involvement from the community. As well, this is an area in which existing organizations in the community with a community development mandate have considerable expertise. Improved opportunities for networking and resources for community development would facilitate sharing of expertise.

12% identified a need for more volunteers.

¹⁸ These are available on the CRA Charities Directorate web site at: www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/menu-e.html

¹⁹ Given the current low level of investment in immigrant services by the corporate sector, more research is needed to determine if it is a good use of limited resources for community organizations to train on soliciting corporate involvement.

Understanding the Range of Assets in Particular Immigrant or Visible Minority Communities

There is a significant diversity among Ottawa's immigrants; diversity with respect to cultural background, ethnicity, language, circumstance of arrival, time spent in Canada, and socio-economic status both in immigrants' countries of origin and in Canada.²⁰

If an asset based approach is truly to be encouraged in addressing diversity in Ottawa, it will be necessary to provide supports so that particular groups can assess and be responsive to the distinct assets and challenges within their particular community. For example :

- It would be important to identify the assets (particularly community groups, services and supports) available to the distinct sub-populations of immigrants who arrived between 1991 and 2001.
- Recent research in Ottawa has highlighted the distinct needs of the growing population of Francophone immigrants.²¹ Among all immigrants living in Ottawa, 16,225 are Francophone, of which almost half (47 percent) are recent immigrants.²² There is a need for more understanding of the degree to which they have adequate access to services offered by organizations serving immigrants in general and by organizations originally designed to serve Franco-Ontarians. Further, more information is needed on the unique assets which have been developed by and for Francophone immigrants from different countries of origin.

Volunteers

The dynamic of volunteering can be a double-edged sword in diverse communities. Volunteering can be of assistance to individuals who need to demonstrate Canadian experience to prospective employees and who may not have people they can offer as references. Some organizations indicated on the survey that they specifically offer volunteering opportunities as a bridge to paid employment. However, volunteering is a poor substitute for adequate employment for immigrants who experience under-employment because of employment barriers (see section on Employment and Income). Further, immigrant and visible minority serving organizations face the same challenges as other voluntary sector organizations, and may be obliged to utilize volunteers for work which should more appropriately be done by paid staff. Some survey respondents felt they should be paying their volunteers but they do not have the resources.

Networking and Partnerships

It is clear from the focus groups and key informant interviews that some organizations feel isolated in their work and would like better opportunities to connect with others. The research confirmed anecdotal information, that informal and small organizations face additional challenges with respect to networking and information sharing. Overall, organizations identified several challenges with respect to networking and partnerships :

²⁰ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. *Immigrants In Ottawa*, ibid

²¹ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. *The Francophones of Ottawa: Statistical Profile of the Francophone Community based on the 2001 census of Statistics Canada, and Catalogue of Community Assets*, October 2004, page 36.

²² SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, ibid

- In some cases, better information on what is happening in the community, who is doing what, and on existing networks would help groups connect with others.
- In other cases, the barrier is more a lack of resources. Participating in partnerships or networks requires some resources, and many of the groups do not have the time or resources to take advantage of opportunities they know exist in the community.
- Finally, through the research a need was identified for additional support to networks for recent immigrant and francophone immigrant and visible minority groups, as well as new networks, particularly :
 - A network of small ethnic specific organizations (i.e. as distinct from established agencies) for the purposes of information sharing and capacity building
 - A network addressing the distinct housing needs of immigrant, visible minority and other diverse groups (Please see the Housing section below)

Communications

The primary challenge identified with respect to communications, is the difficulty in reaching community members when they are dispersed throughout Ottawa.

3. Building on the Assets to Bridge the Challenges

A common criticism of an asset based approach is that it can be mis-used to argue for reducing government responsibility by downloading responsibility onto the community. However, an asset based approach is not a substitute for government or philanthropic intervention, nor an excuse for chronic under-resourcing of community organizations. Properly applied, an asset based approach identifies what supports need to be maintained or put in place (including funding) to maximize the impact of existing assets and to support the advancement of new assets within a community, in order that those assets can fulfill an appropriate role in addressing issues of concern.

In this context, the primary need identified within this study are strategies to enhance the infrastructure of the community groups addressing quality of life issues for immigrant and visible minority community members. The overview of assets in immigrant and visible minority communities identifies a very vibrant and significant infrastructure of community organizations and assets which are active in addressing a broad range of issues. However, it also identifies a tremendous fragility within that infrastructure which puts their collective efforts at risk. Enhancing the infrastructure will require both funding and improved ways of working together.

a) Adequate and Appropriate Funding

Central to stabilizing this network of assets is adequate and appropriate funding in order that a broad diversity of organizations has adequate core resources to be effective in their work. This would require:

- Working within the broader voluntary sector to advance funding frameworks which provide appropriate levels of funding, as well as reasonable frameworks for delivering that funding (e.g. predictability, support for successful and needed

- programs, moving to less competitive models, etc.);
- Providing particular support to small groups so they can effectively compete in current competitive funding frameworks;
- Reviewing the tax and administrative policies related to charitable status to address issues which are identified as having a negative or differential impact on immigrant serving organizations (see section on Advocacy);
- Determining if immigrant and visible minority serving groups are funded at a lower rate than other voluntary sector organizations, and if so, making necessary changes to remedy this.

b) Better Access to Space

Existing assets could be enhanced by improving access to appropriate (normally affordable) space for on-going activities and special needs. This could be advanced by:

- Enhanced communications networks to identify available space;
- Existing organizations looking for ways they could better use their space to support others;
- Ensuring that the City and others with a significant amount of space (e.g. school boards, faith communities, etc.) have policies which maximize the accessibility of public spaces for use by community groups.

c) General Capacity Building and Skill Development

Different organizations have particular skills to share and other skills with which they need help. The asset mapping identified that there is both a great wealth of expertise within the organizations serving immigrant and visible minority communities and a tremendous willingness to share that expertise. A sharing of skills leading to enhanced capacity could be advanced by:

- Improved opportunities for information sharing and networking, so organizations can more effectively partner for mutual support;
- Organizations providing better recognition for the skills of their members and volunteers, and encouraging their members and volunteers to share their particularly skills more widely;
- Continued support for the existing community development functions within established organizations who currently support fledgling organizations²³

d) Improved Information Sharing Opportunities

The description of the communications structures within communities points to the need for a multi-faceted approach to information sharing. Community newspapers, radio and television are important and relatively easy to connect with. It is vital to develop strategies to connect to the word of mouth network, possibly by encouraging organizations to share information through their membership base.

The project identified a substantial need for improved information sharing opportunities.

²³ Those identified within the survey include the seven immigrant settlement organizations, the Community Health and Resource Centres, and the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

Organizations want better means to :

- Know who is doing what and to connect with each other (The on-line directory of organizations which has been created in this project is a starting point (please visit www.spcottawa.on.ca/bok).
- Be aware of available infrastructure supports in a timely manner (e.g. funding opportunities and fundable ideas, space, skill sharing, partnering opportunities);
- Share information on emerging issues and advocacy needs.

e) Improved Supports for Networking

To support increased networking and partnerships there is a need for :

- Adequate financial and in-kind resources for existing networks in order that they can be effective (including continued support for existing community development / capacity building programs within agencies who currently provide support to networks);
- Better information sharing with respect to existing networks and potential partnerships (which is partly an issue of adequate resources);
- Financial and other supports to groups in order that they can participate in networks;
- A need for better information sharing with respect to networks and potential partnership opportunities in the community; and
- Establishment of new networks to address newly identified networking needs, specifically
 - A coalition for small ethnic specific groups (not agency based);
 - A network addressing the distinct housing needs of immigrants.

f) Better Understanding of The Distinctness of Different Immigrant and Visible Minority Groups

There is a need for better information with respect to the distinct groups which make up Ottawa's immigrant and visible minority populations. This could include

- Increased information with respect to distinct immigrant groups, including statistics and with respect to particular assets and challenges (for example, targeted asset mapping);
- Public education, as well as policy and programming frameworks, which recognize the diversity within Ottawa's immigrant and visible minority populations.

g) Improved Ways to Bring the Expertise of Diverse Communities into the Broader Public Discourse

In Ottawa we are fortunate to have a policy framework within the Ottawa 20/20 Plans, particularly the Human Services Plan, which establishes a supportive environment which could enhance existing assets in the various communities (most notably, the overall statement respecting and celebrating cultural and social diversity, the understanding that supporting diversity requires both an economic and a community development approach,

recognizing the voluntary sector as pivotal players, declaring support for cultural expression, identifying the importance of accessibility of public spaces, creating community planning processes which are intended to include the voices of the community, etc.) Community organizations and the City need to find ways to work together more consistently on strategies for concrete implementation of the policy directions, including ensuring that annual budget directions do not work against the framework set out in the Ottawa 20/20 plans.²⁴

The Alternative Planning Group in Toronto is developing models for more effective and appropriate processes for involving diverse communities in municipal planning and in addressing issues within their own communities. Their models recognize the assets, including the expertise within existing communities to address issues. Given the vibrancy and diversity of assets in Ottawa which have been identified in this overview, their models may offer a useful starting point for bringing together existing assets in Ottawa with the broad policy directions in the Ottawa 20/20 plans.

²⁴ For example, several research participants felt the loss of the one time grant stream in the 2004 City budget had disproportionately affected small immigrant groups attempting to address emerging needs.

IV. Moving Forward on Priority Issues

Despite the diversity of Ottawa's immigrant and visible minority populations, there are several issues on which many groups share some common experiences. The project undertook a very general overview of some of the assets and challenges across distinct communities with respect to four priority issues : Employment and Income, Housing, Access to Services and Advocacy.

1. Employment and Income

Assets and Challenges Identified

Education, Training, and Skill Levels

Within many immigrant and visible minority communities there are high levels of education and training, representing a tremendous asset at the individual level. The importance of this with respect to voluntary sector organizations has been identified above (i.e the skill level of volunteers and members). Existing research in Ottawa has clearly identified that despite education and training, many immigrants face barriers entering the workforce, leading to substantial underemployment of skilled immigrants and to wasted assets for developing Ottawa's economy in general.²⁵ For example, in 2001 70% of the skilled immigrants who came to Ottawa had difficulties entering the workforce; 26% had troubles using their foreign credentials; and 22% reported language difficulties as a barrier to jobs.²⁶ Immigrant and visible minority Francophones face increased barriers.²⁷ A significant asset based project, the Foreign Trained Workers Project, has identified this asset of education and training, and is developing strategies to facilitate the entry of people with foreign credentials into the fields of work for which they are trained.

As well, many immigrants place a very high value on education as the primary means to meaningful employment. This emphasis on education is an asset which translates into a very broad range of formal and informal organizations offering initiatives to support better education outcomes, particularly for immigrant or visible minority youth as well as the children of first

An Asset Based Success Story

The Foreign Trained Teachers Project (initiated by World Skills)

Accelerating the
accreditation of teachers
licensed in other
countries.

See page 46 for details

An Asset Based Success Story

Mentorship Programs and Homework Clubs

Students helping students
succeed in school.

See page 47 for details

²⁵ See TalentWorks Program (Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation), Immigrants Employment Needs Assessment Projects. Ottawa, TalentWorks, June, 2004, and Social Planning Council of Ottawa. Francophones in Ottawa, *ibid*.

²⁶ Tam, P. & O'Connor, E. (2003, Oct 12). Is there a cabbie in the house? The cliché about drivers is true. *Ottawa Citizen*, A13.

²⁷ SPC, Francophones, page 24.

generation immigrants. Many respondents to the survey, including informal groups, were providing supports to education. These initiatives included:

- homework clubs for particular community members,
- the Multicultural Liaison Officer program of OCISO to assist community members to address challenges they face in the school system,
- mentoring initiatives to encourage youth from particular communities to go to college or universities
- scholarships.

Income of Community Members

Income and employment were identified as a central issue flowing from the conference because it is well documented and understood that many immigrant groups have average incomes lower than the average incomes for the general population, including higher rates of poverty. For example, the 2001 census shows that about one-half of unattached recent immigrants live in poverty. This compares to 30 percent of Canadian-born unattached individuals.²⁸

The severity of this issue has tended to over-shadow an examination of the incomes of immigrants as potential assets. While some immigrants face great poverty, in fact there is much more per capita income within immigrant communities overall than has been assumed. For example, the 2001 census shows that the incidence of low income was lower for immigrants living in economic families than for Canadian-born Ottawa residents in similar living arrangements.²⁹ 16 percent of recent immigrants and 25 percent of earlier immigrants received employment incomes of \$60,000 or more, compared to 22 percent of non-immigrants....³⁰ Further, while the credentials of many immigrants are not recognized, leading to substantial underemployment, at the same time, “the 2001 census data show that recent immigrants in Ottawa are not concentrated in low-skilled employment. Among recent immigrant men, 38 percent of men and 18 percent of women are occupied in professional jobs in the field of natural and applied sciences. Similarly 9 percent of men and 5 percent of women have management positions, ... among those ... one third (215 individuals) has senior management occupations”³¹

The income levels of immigrants varies depending on many factors. Nonetheless, participants in the research identified some of the ways in which individuals’ incomes within immigrant communities is being used for the benefit of the community. These benefits fell into three categories:

a) The Potential for Philanthropy.

Several participants drew attention to successful fundraising initiatives within their community, either for a particular organization or initiative or within a permanent philanthropic infrastructure within the community.

b) Using Expenditure Patterns of Community Members Strategically

Some participants noted the possibility of encouraging commerce which would

²⁸ SPC, Immigrants in Ottawa, *ibid.*

²⁹ SPC, Immigrants in Ottawa, *ibid.*

³⁰ SPC, Immigrants in Ottawa, *ibid.*

³¹ SPC, Immigrants in Ottawa, *ibid.*

support community members, such as patronizing a store selling ethnic specific foodstuffs. Some communities in Ottawa have developed directories of ethnic specific businesses and services to facilitate this. As well, communities may have the ability to influence what is available in the general market by being strategic about promoting their needs as a niche market. One example which was mentioned was the possibility of enticing private developers/landlords to create housing which would suit distinct needs for particular immigrant groups, by demonstrating the profitability of serving that market.

c) Individual Wealth for Local Investment / Development

A few participants suggested that financing and capital might be available from individuals in the community for start-up projects or businesses in the community. Such investments could take the form of charitable contributions or financing which would provide a return for the individual investor. These suggestions reflect strategies proposed by John McKnight, perhaps the leading proponent of asset based community development.

Supports For Finding and Retaining Employment

A very important asset which is common in many distinct immigrant and visible minority communities are informal networks by which community members with businesses are encouraged to hire fellow community members to help them get established.

The strategies used by communities to support employment of their members goes well beyond this informal networking, however. Survey respondents identified numerous initiatives in which they are supporting immigrants in their efforts to find and keep suitable employment. These included:

- opportunities to volunteer to gain “Canadian experience”, references or contacts;
- child or elder care for people attending job search related activities
- material supports (for example, for transportation costs, suitable clothing, etc.)
- Loans for education, training or certification
- Traditional job search supports (resume writing, job search techniques)
- Referrals to potential employers
- Language training

Some of these services are offered to all immigrants by established agencies, through purchase of service agreements with various levels of government. These form the foundation of supports with respect to employment. A directory of these services can be found at www.iwin.on.ca/ottawa/index.htm.

Other organizations, including some smaller organizations, offer supports which address needs of distinct groups or which fill certain gaps in the government sponsored programs (for example, language training for people who do not qualify for government sponsored language training). This is a response to a concern which has been identified in earlier research³² in Ottawa, specifically, the issue of inequitable access of some immigrants to

³² Social Planning Council of Ottawa. Is the job market workable? Ottawa, Social Planning Council of

employment and to language supports, particularly women and Francophone immigrants. As well, participants in the focus group on employment and income felt that the traditional job supports (resumé writing, job search and interviewing techniques) reflect a North American model of job hunting which may not be effective for some immigrants.

The services provided by formal and informal organizations are all important in offering a range of supports addressing different employment needs.

The Potential for Employment in the Voluntary Sector and the Broader Public Sector

Several participants in the focus groups and key informant interviews identified the asset of a significant voluntary and broader public service sector in Ottawa. Several felt that the workforces of these sectors should be more representative of the population. However, some participants felt that in many cases, immigrant workers currently working in the voluntary sector were in vulnerable employment, with contracts tied to specific short term projects.

The literature review confirmed that these sectors may have potential . Whereas the government, social service and education sectors are among the leading employment generators in the City of Ottawa [the third leading job creators], it is noteworthy that only 6 percent of recent immigrant men and 10 percent of the women are working in [these sectors] ...³³ There is a need to identify the reasons why more immigrants are not employed within these sectors, and to address barriers which might be identified. Further, strategies to stabilize employment in the voluntary sector would be of benefit to all employees within the sector, including immigrant and visible minority community members.

Entrepreneurship

An asset which was highlighted in the focus groups and the key informant interviews was the entrepreneurship of many immigrants. This sentiment is reinforced to some degree by the 2001 census. “Immigrants are more likely to be self-employed than are Canadian-born workers. Among immigrants, the 1981 – 1990 cohort displays the highest propensity to self-employment, with one in five of its’ members working in their own business ventures. ... About 11 percent of recent immigrant workers are self-employed.”³⁴

While some immigrants come with significant capital and establish large companies, participants in the study focussed on small businesses. Participants believed immigrants established small businesses either because they are marginalized from adequate paid employment or because they have come from an economy with substantial small business

Ottawa, 2001, and
SPC, Francophones, *ibid*, and
Working Group on Women’s Access to Municipal Services in Ottawa (WGWAMSO). Making the New City of Ottawa Work for Women” The results from focus groups on women’s experiences accessing municipal services in Ottawa, Ottawa, WGWAMSO, 2001.

³³ SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, *ibid*.

³⁴ SPC, *Immigrants in Ottawa*, *ibid*.

enterprise and are familiar with running a business. Some people have come from a culture which encouraged economic co-operatives and are drawn to the establishment of worker co-operatives or community economic development initiatives. To the extent that small business development can offer opportunities to improve the incomes of immigrants, there was agreement that supports to entrepreneurship were advantageous to immigrant communities.

A few survey respondents indicated they provide support for small business start-ups or community economic development for immigrant and visible minority communities.³⁵ However, the general sense from the focus groups and key informant interviews is that the current network of supports to immigrants either for starting a conventional small business or for community economic development ventures (including worker co-operatives) needs to be expanded. The particular gaps which were identified through the research with respect to these supports were:

- more opportunities to access start-up capital
- a “one stop” service where fledgling entrepreneurs could get a variety of services, including financing³⁶
- increased supports for education and assistance in a culturally appropriate manner for start up and on-going management.
- access to proper research to determine viable markets for potential new businesses, especially new community economic development businesses
- better marketing for community based businesses
- on-going subsidies to community economic development initiatives which provide meaningful employment to residents who face multiple barriers, and
- research to identify best practices with respect to increasing the profitability of community economic development initiatives including worker co-ops.

**An Asset Based
Success Story**

CIFODE
(Centre d’intégration, de
formation et de
développement
économique)

Helping Francophone
immigrant women
integrate into the
workforce and enhance
their incomes.

See page 47 for details

The existence of substantial business and management expertise within immigrant communities is clearly an asset which could benefit less experienced business people in the immigrant communities. Mentoring is one means by which this kind of expertise can be shared, and several groups have or are in the process of establishing a mentoring network for fledgling businesses. Further, survey respondents identified several ethnic business associations. These are an important resource, with potential to build the financial capital of the community, to provide peer support for fledgling business operators and to encourage businesses to help in promoting the social infrastructure of the community.

³⁵ See also www.iwin.on.ca/ottawa/index.htm

³⁶ A dilemma which would-be entrepreneurs sometimes face is concern on the part of potential financiers that they have all the skills to advance the business. A one stop service which included those advancing capital, would allow the individual to obtain on-going direct management support and advice which could satisfy the concerns of the lender.

The research identified several ways in which certain businesses provide some form of support to the social infrastructure of the community. The most commonly mentioned support was to provide space for meetings or events. Communications through various commercial news outlets was mentioned as a support to the work of groups. In some communities, certain types of businesses serve as a meeting place for community members (for example a barber shop, a restaurant or a specialized food outlet). Charitable contributions and providing opportunities for volunteering were other supports mentioned. While the responses are not numerically significant, they point to specific assistance which community groups could solicit from businesses.

Building on the Assets to Bridge the Challenges

This quick overview of assets and challenges related to employment and incomes points to several strategies which could support and enhance existing assets :

- Expand initiatives which facilitate the recognition of foreign acquired credentials and training;
- Ensure financial and in-kind resources to formal and informal groups which offer supports with respect to successful educational outcomes and employment supports, with particular attention to the needs of groups which face additional barriers.
- Work with voluntary sector organizations to offer volunteer opportunities which will be more effective in addressing the barrier of employer demands for « Canadian experience »
- Develop strategies within the voluntary sector to take a leadership role in increasing employment opportunities for immigrant and visible minority community members,³⁷ and encourage similar strategies in the broader public sector (e.g. the municipal government, education sector, etc.)
- Support culturally appropriate entrepreneurship supports for immigrants starting new businesses. These supports should be on a spectrum of interventions from public education and training, mentoring opportunities, possibly a « one stop » service, supports for ethnic specific business associations, examination of policies to identify those which might be disproportionately affecting immigrant owned businesses, and access to capital and financing.
- Encourage the formation and continuation of ethnic business associations, and support them to consider ways they can increase the social capital within their respective communities.

³⁷ The strategy proposed here would only be of advantage if the jobs into which immigrants were hired were adequate with respect to salary, working conditions, and stability. It would not be an effective strategy to increase hiring into marginal jobs within the voluntary sector.

2. Housing

Assets and Challenges Identified

Supports to Getting and Maintaining Appropriate Housing

Survey participants identified dozens of initiatives by which they are supporting immigrant or visible minority community members to get or keep for appropriate housing. These included:

- referring to landlords; providing a reference letter, arranging a guarantor
- information and referrals with respect to housing and shelters
- eviction prevention, conflict resolution or individual advocacy
- providing temporary shelter
- providing emergency funds for housing related expenses
- interpretation related to emergency housing
- creating affordable housing for community members
- managing housing projects to meet the needs of community members
- help relocating due to violence at home
- support to people who leave shelters
- undertaking advocacy with respect to the housing needs of the community
- culturally appropriate home supports (e.g. Meals on Wheels).

Many services which were identified are services for the general public. This points to the effectiveness of service models within many of the mainstream housing organizations. Some participants, however, identified the need for better information sharing with respect to existing resources.

Within many communities there is an important asset based strategy which is based on traditional values and peer relations within the community. Although it takes several forms and goes by many names, the common element is a money lending circle in which community members can participate. These money lending circles are an important asset within the communities, and represent an asset based approach to the problem of individual community members accessing capital for extraordinary circumstances. While these funds are used for many purposes, research participants identified their importance for addressing the challenges of first and last month's rent or other extraordinary housing costs. While community members from all walks of life (and with incomes from a variety of sources) may have access to these money lending circles, Ontario legislation creates a barrier for community members who receive social assistance payments. Social assistance legislation does not permit community members on social assistance to take part in these community based strategies, without facing possible penalties. In this way, an important community asset which is available to many community members, in some cases is not available to those particular community members who may be in the most financial need.

An Asset Based Success Story

The Women's Box
(Based at Carlington
Community Health Centre)

A money lending circle
based on the tradition of
loan circles in some
countries.

See page 48 for details

Initiatives to Meet the Distinct Housing Needs of Particular Immigrant Populations

While many immigrants find suitable housing within the general housing market, others face great challenges finding housing which meets their needs.³⁸ Some recent immigrants families are large (six or more members), and find it difficult to find appropriate housing in the general market. As well, the gap between average housing costs and the incomes of some immigrants has continued to be a significant problem for immigrants, particularly some recent immigrants.

In response to the housing difficulties faced by their members, several communities in the 1970's and 80's developed affordable housing projects for their community members using government funding available at that time. These non-profit housing projects still exist as an affordable housing asset in Ottawa, although the research identified that they may no longer be primarily serving the community for which they were originally intended.

With the loss of significant funding for social housing, it has been difficult for communities to address their housing needs through the development of new housing projects. Despite the challenges, some community groups are developing innovative strategies for financing affordable housing in order that they can create new housing options. A few have created small homes which adhere to particular cultural or religious traditions. The Multifaith Housing Initiative is a success story by which members from different faith communities are attempting to mobilize the assets of their respective faith communities in order to develop affordable housing. While the housing which they are developing is not targeted for any particular religious or cultural group, their model has potential for distinct groups to mobilize land and capital assets within their particular community.

The number of immigrants who are seniors is growing, and will naturally increase as the population in Ottawa ages. It is important that a plan is put in place to address the distinct needs of immigrant seniors, along with planning for the aging of the Ottawa population in general. A recent research project by Active Jewish Adults 50+ identified the following challenge:

“Currently finding appropriate housing for seniors' from a specific ethno-cultural or religious group can be a tremendous challenge. While many will find suitable seniors' housing within the housing available to the general seniors' population, a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not accommodate diverse cultural and religious practices and traditions. For example, the food provided in a seniors' housing project may be unfamiliar or may offend the religious beliefs and traditions of

An Asset Based Success Story

The Multifaith Housing Initiative

Bringing together people from different religions and faiths to work on a common vision of providing adequate, accessible, and affordable housing to low income people.

See page 48 for details

³⁸ During the 2002 Mosaic conference, participants had identified the challenge of the growing number of immigrants using the emergency shelter system. It has been announced that in 2005 there will be a community planning process to develop a community action plan to address homelessness and the risk of homelessness among immigrant groups.

some members of a particular community, certain practices in the health care services provided may conflict with cultural or religious traditions, or individuals may face language barriers in their dealings with staff and other residents.”³⁹

Active Jewish Adults 50+ (AJA50+) is an example of a success story in Ottawa with respect to appropriate planning to meet the distinct needs of particular seniors in Ottawa. While the vast majority of the members of Active Jewish Adults 50+ are not immigrants, their planning model is one which can be used by specific cultural, religious or ethnic groups. AJA50+ identified that planning for the distinct needs of their seniors included three elements: seeking opportunities to develop new affordable housing, enhancing the cultural and religious milieu for senior community members living in close proximity to each other (e.g. in a highrise), and considering the range of supports necessary to enable vulnerable seniors to live independently in their own housing. They recognized that it is a challenge to ensure that vulnerable adults do not become isolated from the communal life of their specific ethnic or religious group. Even when seniors may be living with family members, they may not have opportunities to connect with other seniors, and may be alone during the work / school day. Furthermore, generic services to support aging in place (Meals on Wheels, home care, etc.) may not be appropriate for the cultural and religious practices of particular communities. By providing services such as culturally appropriate meals-on-wheels, friendly visiting, cultural / religious celebrations in highrise buildings where there is a concentration of people from the distinct community, etc, organizations support vulnerable community members to maintain appropriate housing and community connections.

**An Asset Based
Success Story**

**Active Jewish Adults
50+**

Meeting the needs of Jewish adults over 50, including planning for a range of housing needs.

See page 49 for details

The survey revealed there is an important set of services which are provided by informal and formal organizations to reduce the isolation and vulnerability of seniors with diverse and distinct backgrounds, living in apartments and homes dispersed across the City. This addresses part of the need with respect to meeting the distinct needs of diverse seniors.

Financial and Land Resources Within the Communities

Participants identified the possibility of using financial and land resources which exist within the various communities, including faith-based assets and ethnic specific financial institutions, to build affordable housing. This has been discussed elsewhere in the report.

Income

It was identified that a few communities have worked with particular private sector landlords to enhance the milieu or to accommodate the distinct needs of a particular group, when that group forms a significant portion of the landlord’s customer base. This

³⁹ Active Jewish Adults 50+. Community Solutions For Seniors’ Housing An Overview of Existing Seniors’ Housing Models Across Canada, Ottawa: Social Planning Council of Ottawa, July 2001, page 38.

is an example of community members identifying expenditure patterns in order to encourage the private market to be more responsive to their community's needs.

Networks Addressing Housing Needs

One fifth of survey respondents indicated they were interested in working with others on housing issues for immigrants.⁴⁰ Some specified areas of particular interest, specifically, developing non-profit or other affordable housing, advocating for changes to the Tenant Protection Act, addressing hydro and heat issues for people with limited incomes, developing awareness of and connecting clients to housing related services. Better information sharing would enable immigrant and visible minority serving organizations to connect more easily with existing housing related networks.⁴¹

However, the research suggests there is a need for a new network addressing the housing needs of immigrants. The desire for networking opportunities resonates with the recommendations from a conference on Inclusive Housing in September 2003. Almost one hundred people from Ottawa participated in the conference, including people from various immigrant and visible minority groups. The recommendation from this conference was for a virtual network on inclusive housing which would include other population groups marginalized in the current housing market.

Building on the Assets to Bridge the Challenges

This quick overview of assets and challenges related to housing points to several strategies which could support and enhance existing assets :

- Provide increased financial and in-kind support to organizations developing new affordable housing
- Conduct policy research and advocacy with respect to changing the penalties and disincentives in current social assistance legislation with respect to asset based approaches to improving housing (e.g. money lending circles).
- Community organizations participate in the upcoming community planning process to meet the needs of immigrants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Develop a plan to meet the needs of immigrants as they age, including continued support for culturally appropriate services which support aging in place and reduced isolation
- Improve information sharing with respect to housing services and housing related networks
- Establish a virtual network to build understanding and develop an action plan with respect to advancing inclusive housing for immigrant and visible minority community members and others marginalized from the housing market.

⁴⁰ This response cannot tell us whether respondents will actually participate if given specific networking opportunities, nor whether they have the capacity to participate.

⁴¹ For example, there is a network in the City addressing high utility costs as they relate to housing, as well as a group advocating for changes to the Tenant Protection Act.

3. Access To Services

Assets and Challenges Identified

Information Sharing

In the focus group, information sharing was identified as one of three factors in accessing services. Both the focus groups and the survey responses indicated there is an extensive infrastructure of information sharing on services and access to services, utilizing all of the means identified in the discussion on communications. Many of the informal organizations play an important role by providing information and referrals in a manner which is accessible. (See The Somali Womens' Info Hotline on 54 as an example). Nonetheless, the general sense was that there was inadequate information for immigrants about services and how to access them.

The Means to Access Services

The second factor with respect to access to services which was identified in the focus group was having the means to access services. Both formal and informal organizations provide aids such as cost, transportation, child and elder care, and use of a phone to enable community members to access services. The survey revealed there is a broad network of these sorts of supports throughout the communities, and that the informal organizations in particular, play an important role in assisting their members in this manner. The challenge is that these supports require cash or in-kind resources, and may stretch the capacity of organizations.

Accessibility Within Services

The third factor identified in the focus group was accessibility within services. This was discussed in terms of services to meet distinct needs, alternative services, and changes to mainstream organizations to make them more accessible.

a) Services to Meet the Distinct Needs of Diverse Immigrant and Visible Minority Groups

Many of the formal and informal organizations who responded to the survey have developed programming to fill a need which is distinct to their particular group. Many of these start as small initiatives and eventually grow into established organizations.⁴² An example of this is Immigrant Women Services Ottawa, which was formed to respond to support immigrant women facing violence in their own home.

<p>An Asset Based Success Story</p> <p>Immigrant Women Services Ottawa</p> <p>Creating positive changes in women's lives.</p> <p>See page 49 for details</p>
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⁴² A success story which demonstrates this is the CESOC, providing employment services for francophone immigrants.

Another success story in Ottawa is “Local Agencies Serving Immigrants (LASI)” through which several major organizations work together to provide settlement services to Ottawa’s immigrants. Catholic Immigration Services is one of these organizations, and provides the Host Program which plays a key role for many immigrants upon their arrival in Ottawa.

**An Asset Based
Success Story**

The Host Program
(Catholic Immigration Centre)

Recruiting and training Canadian volunteers to become friends, or “hosts” to new immigrants and refugees to Ottawa.

See page 50 for details

b) Alternative Services in the Community

Participants in the survey identified several services which are offered within their community which are alternatives to mainstream services. These may be provided by for-profit practitioners or by voluntary sector organizations. The majority which were identified relate to mental and physical health and well-being (such as traditional health practices, tai chi programs, healing circles rooted in their culture). The examples point to a tradition in some cultures of a holistic approach to health, often with an emphasis on prevention. Some mainstream services have added programs consistent with these traditional approaches and they are beginning to be explored within mainstream debates with respect to health policy and programming.

c) Activities to Increase Access to Mainstream Services

The survey, focus groups and interviews all confirm that many services originally intended for the general population are well sensitized and have modified their service delivery to be more culturally and linguistically accessible. In particular, participants highlighted the community houses and the community health and resource centres as particular « best practices ». Some participants also identified models in which mainstream organizations form a partnership with an organization serving immigrant or visible minority community members, to provide a new service to address an emerging need.⁴³

**Two Asset Based
Success Stories**

**Community Health and
Resource Centres and
Debra Dynes Family House**

Providing a range of
community based services
with and for the community.

See pages 50 & 51 for details

Many organizations who responded to the survey offer services to assist community members to address the many barriers which still exist in accessing mainstream services. These range from informal services such as

⁴³ A prominent example of this is the partnership between Ottawa Community Immigrant Services and the Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa Branch, to provide mental health services to victims of torture.

accompaniment and informal cultural interpretation, to formal programs. An important service in Ottawa which was created by immigrant women is the Cultural Interpretation Service of Ottawa. Another example of an Ottawa success story is the Multicultural Liaison Officer program created by Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization. It has received awards for its' work in bridging the gap between mainstream educational services and diverse communities.

While the research identifies that there has been substantial progress with respect to access to services over the past twenty years, it also highlights that there is a long way to go. The Ottawa 20/20 Growth Plans have articulated support for inclusion of diverse communities, but there is a pressing need for stakeholders in the community to work together on a concrete plan to achieve this goal. Given the fact that immigrant and visible minority community members are dispersed across the City, such planning needs to be based on comprehensive neighborhood-level research which sheds light on geographic distribution of specific large cultural groups and their needs, concerns and strengths.⁴⁴ The planning should also take into account existing research which has identified both barriers and solutions, such as the on-going project on Women's Access to Municipal Services. Such planning must provide for effective involvement of immigrants.

In the interim, there is a need for increased cultural competence in existing services and government departments, as well as cross cultural education. Mainstream services need to continuously evaluate and revise their services to be more responsive to the changing needs of diverse communities.

Networking and Partnerships

Within the sector there are many networks which have been developed to advance distinct services or to increase access to mainstream services. A success story which highlights the importance of networking in advancing access to services is the Multicultural Health Coalition.

An Asset Based Success Story

Cultural Interpretation Service of Ottawa

A community based service to enable mainstream services to communicate with their users.

See page 52 for details

An Asset Based Success Story

Multicultural Liaison Officers (OCISO)

Helping parents, students and teachers in the school system to bridge the cultural gap.

See page 53 for details

An Asset Based Success Story

Multicultural Health Coalition

Increasing the cooperation between agencies and diverse communities to increase access to health for multicultural communities.

See page 53 for details

⁴⁴ SPC, Immigrants in Ottawa, ibid

The importance of networks and partnerships has been discussed elsewhere in the report, as well as the need for adequate financial and in-kind supports to facilitate their work. A small number of survey respondents, particularly smaller organizations, indicated they would be interested in working with others on increasing access to services. Improved information sharing with respect to existing networking opportunities would be the most appropriate first step to respond to this interest.

Building on the assets to bridge the challenges

This quick overview of assets and challenges related to access to services points to several strategies which could support and enhance existing assets :

- Financial and in-kind support for formal and informal organizations and networks offering services to increase access to services
- Increased resources for cross cultural education and cultural competency training and resources
- Establishment of a participatory planning process to more effectively address access to services for immigrant and visible minority community members

4. Advocacy

Assets and Challenges Identified

27% of survey respondents indicated they had lobbied a government official. 8% with respect to their own funding and 19% with respect to a broader community issue. Of those who had lobbied with respect to issues beyond their own funding, only 7% had lobbied on more than one issue. 17% indicated they had been successful, with an additional 7% saying they had mixed response, that is, 24% had had full or partial success. 3% felt they had not been successful.

While only a very small number of those who had participated in advocacy were small, informal organizations, the Somali Info Hotline is one such example. In the summer of 2004, when the funding to the Hotline was about to run out, many Somali women who had used the service but who had never before undertaken advocacy activities, called up their elected representatives to explain the need for the service and to ask that it be saved. This is an example of how direct service activities sometimes result in skill and confidence building with respect to residents' involvement in government decision-making.

An Asset Based Success Story

Somali Women's Info Hotline

Providing information
and referral to Somali
women, in their own
language.

See page 54 for details

The survey mirrors the findings of the focus groups and key informant interviews, that large established agencies (i.e. charitable non-profit organizations) form much of the foundation of advocacy on issues affecting immigrant and visible minority community members. This highlights the role of charitable non-profit organizations as important leaders in policy discussions affecting immigrants and visible minorities.

However, charitable non-profit organizations face many barriers to fulfilling this role. Several earlier studies⁴⁵ identified concerns that the legal framework on charitable status created barriers to agencies effectively fulfilling their advocacy role. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these challenges in depth, this earlier research had indicated the legal framework regulating charitable status,

“...impedes the agency’s capacity to serve refugees and immigrants in a more effective way. It encroaches on the agencies’ ability to:

-Launch public education and advocacy activities aimed at removing barriers

-Participate in the public policy making process

-Secure enough funds to ensure the efficient running of offices.”⁴⁶

The Canadian Revenue Agency revised its administrative policy on political activities in September, 2003,⁴⁷ and, as the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society notes, “the new guidelines reduce confusion and provide additional latitude to charities, but the guidelines are constrained by the poorly drafted provisions of the Income Tax Act. Proper remedy of the problem requires modest legislative amendment.”⁴⁸

Current funding frameworks are another challenge which have been found to negatively affect the ability of organizations to undertake advocacy. In the 70s and 80s groups were more proactive in advocacy, but in the 90s, with the funding cutbacks, groups are preoccupied with finding their own financial resources, and don’t have the time or energy to advocate on a collective level.⁴⁹

Survey participants identified another asset in relation to advocacy, specifically particular individuals who emerge as community leaders and spokespersons even in very recently arrived communities.. In many cases they are faith leaders (given the significance of faith institutions identified above), in other cases they may be a respected elder, a visionary with respect to providing services appropriate for the community, or an owner of a successful business. These individuals are a great asset within their particular community, and are also an asset with respect to ensuring there is a voice for immigrants and visible minorities in general in policy discussions. Within this research a few individuals were identified by name as assets within their community. While this is a starting point, it would be important to continue to identify such individuals from a wide variety of immigrant and visible minority communities, to seek their input on public policy matters, to provide one more means to connect with diverse communities, and to encourage their involvement in collective advocacy with other immigrant and visible minority leaders. With the exception of agency based coalitions and networks, there are

⁴⁵ Tendai Musodzi Marowa, *ibid*, and Rashmi Luther, *Advocacy Matters*, *ibid*, and Rashmi Luther, *Ethnocultural / Ethnoracial Advocacy Groups*, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Tendai Musodzi Marowa, *ibid*, page 12.

⁴⁷ The policy is available online at www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/policy/cps/cps-022-e.html

⁴⁸ From the 2004 document titled “Tax Policy, Charities and Democracy in Canada: A Summary of the Problem and Remedy”, at page 4. (available at <http://www.impacs.org/files/Summary%20of%20Issue%20and%20Remedyver2.pdf>)

⁴⁹ Rashmi Luther, *Advocacy Matters*, *ibid*.

currently very few forums or processes in the City to connect these community leaders, in order that they could collectively speak out on issues of concern affecting immigrant and visible minority groups.

Too often immigrant and visible minority communities are absent at decision-making tables, or their issues are raised in a token manner. Some participants were frustrated with the fact that numerous consultations and studies have identified similar issues, but have not led to significant change. Recent research in Toronto suggests that the effective involvement of immigrants in public policy discussions (at least at the municipal level) requires a process in which discussion of issues is fostered within the community organizations and is part of setting the policy agenda, rather than those organizations being asked only to respond to a pre-set policy agenda. For this, it is necessary to establish a framework in which organizations have enough resources that they are not consumed with their own survival as an organization. We heard fairly strongly from many community organizations that advocacy for funding was necessary before they could turn their mind to advocacy on issues. Therefore, progress on capacity building for the organizations as described earlier, with appropriate funding as the cornerstone, is key. Improved information sharing, including better access to data and policy information, would assist individual groups to advocate on issues which are of particular concern to them. Finally, improved opportunities for networking along with increased community development support would assist groups in coming together on issues which they define are of common concern (for example, potentially the issues of housing for immigrants), rather than them being only solicited to participate in token ways in short term consultative processes.

Some participants identified they were interested in getting more involved in advocacy activities (on issues of concern to them), but they would benefit from advocacy tools and skills. The suggestions ranged from basic civic education (e.g. “who is your elected representative?”, etc.) to specific skill building such as media relations or making a presentation, and “getting your message out to the broader community”. Some identified the need for greater access to data in order to verify their concerns. Many resources currently exist in the City for skill building. Once again, improved information sharing structures would enable groups to more easily access these existing resources. In some cases, particular community education processes would be beneficial. One success story with respect to skill building for advocacy is a project called, “A City for All Women”, which is described in Appendix 3.

**An Asset Based
Success Story**

**A City For All
Women**

A project to identify ways of ensuring that women and men in Ottawa have equal opportunity to make and influence decisions about our city.

See page 54 for details

Building on the Assets to Bridge the Challenges

National level research has clearly demonstrated that the degree to which particular immigrant communities get involved in advocacy and have a voice in the political process is strongly related to the degree of development of the community infrastructure within that community, which itself is strongly related to the passage of time. When

groups are quite new in Canada, most of the organizations which develop in that community are strongly focussed on fairly immediate needs. Over time, as members of the group have been in Canada longer, more and diverse community organizations are developed to take on the diverse activities identified in the overview at the beginning of this report. While this is the normal process of integration and political development, there are, nonetheless, interventions or supports which can be put in place which can assist in advancing the voice of diverse communities, even as they proceed on the path of developing their own community infrastructure. This quick overview of assets and challenges related to advocacy points to several strategies which could support and enhance existing assets :

- Strengthen the capacity of charitable non-profit agencies to continue to play a leadership role with respect to advocacy on issues of concern to immigrant and visible minority communities by completing the regulatory changes with respect to charitable status which are currently in process
- Develop strategies to identify key leaders in various immigrant and visible minority communities and to provide information and opportunities for them to connect, in order to identify issues affecting each of their communities and to undertake collective advocacy on those issues
- Develop a funding and resource framework which enables organizations in the sector to move past survival mode
- Ensure community development support to create increased opportunities for small groups to identify their own priorities, be proactive in discussing strategies for making change, and participate in meaningful ways in related policy discussions
- Improve information sharing, access to relevant data, and networking opportunities
- Improve supports for skill building with respect to advocacy and citizen participation in policy issues

V. Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations

Within immigrant and visible minority communities in Ottawa there are significant assets. The assets of the various communities are often not well recognized in the traditional focus on needs rather than strengths. These assets can be summarized as follows:

- community members with considerable talents and expertise;
- tangible assets such as temples, mosques, community centres, retail businesses;
- an extensive network of formal and informal organizations;
- cultural traditions and experiences that stimulate creative solutions to issues;
- traditions of mutual support; and
- economic activities especially entrepreneurial activities and small businesses.

As well, many mainstream organizations are seen as assets within immigrant and visible minority communities.

Immigrant and visible minority communities in Ottawa are very diverse. For example, even within the population of “new immigrants” there are very different populations. The assets of the various communities are equally diverse. They vary in size, types of

activities, structure, age, use of volunteers and staff, leadership, and access to resources, among other factors. It is essential that the diversity and flexibility within the assets be maintained, in order to appropriately meet the distinct needs of diverse groups. Some emphasis should be placed on particular groups who face additional challenges, for example, some of the newer immigrant groups and Francophone visible minority communities.

The overview of assets in immigrant and visible minority communities identifies a very vibrant and significant infrastructure of community organizations and assets which are active in addressing a broad range of issues. However, it also identifies a tremendous fragility within that infrastructure which puts their collective efforts at risk. Enhancing the infrastructure will require both funding and improved ways of working together. The recommendations below are summarized from the report, and represent a proposed direction forward, which would enhance the ability of existing assets to meet community needs and to fully develop their potential to move the issues into the agenda of the mainstream.

1. **Improve the funding base** of existing formal and informal organizations undertaking direct service delivery, community development and networking.
 - Work within the broader voluntary sector to advance funding frameworks which provide appropriate funding frameworks and levels of funding;
 - Provide particular support to small groups so they can effectively compete in current competitive funding frameworks;
 - Proceed with proposed changes to the tax and administrative policies related to charitable status to address current challenges;
 - Determine if immigrant and visible minority serving groups are funded at a lower rate than other voluntary sector organizations, and if so, making necessary changes.
2. Increase **access to affordable or free space**.
 - Increase sharing of information about available space;
 - Encourage better use of space by existing organizations to support others;
 - Increase access to space owned by the City and others with a significant amount of space (e.g. school boards, faith communities, etc.).
3. Improve supports for **networking and information sharing**
 - Enhance financial and in-kind resources for existing networks, existing community development / capacity building programs, and existing groups for participation;
 - Increase information sharing about existing networks and potential partnerships;
 - Establish new networks to address newly identified networking needs (e.g. a coalition for small ethnic specific groups (not agency based) and a network addressing the distinct housing needs of distinct cultural groups).
4. Improve **understanding of the distinctness** of different immigrant and visible minority groups
5. **Improve models of planning and consultation** to bring the expertise of diverse communities into the broader public discourse

6. **Support community assets with respect to employment and income:**
 - Expand initiatives regarding the recognition of foreign acquired credentials;
 - Ensure financial and in-kind resources to formal / informal groups which offer supports for successful educational and employment outcomes;
 - Increase meaningful volunteer opportunities which will address the barrier of employer demands for « Canadian experience »;
 - The voluntary sector take a leadership role to increase meaningful employment opportunities for immigrant and visible minority residents, and encourage similar strategies in the broader public sector (e.g. the education sector);
 - Support culturally appropriate entrepreneurship supports for immigrants starting new businesses;
 - Encourage the formation and continuation of ethnic business associations.

7. **Support community assets with respect to housing:**
 - Increase financial and in-kind support to organizations developing new affordable housing
 - Address disincentives in current social assistance legislation with respect to asset based approaches to improving housing (e.g. money lending circles).
 - Develop a plan to meet the needs of immigrants as they age
 - Improve information sharing with respect to housing services and housing related networks, including the establishment of a virtual network to advance inclusive housing

8. **Support community assets with respect to access to services:**
 - Increase financial and in-kind support for formal and informal organizations and networks offering services to increase access to services;
 - Increase resources for cross cultural education and cultural competency training and resources;
 - Establish a participatory planning process to more effectively address access to services for immigrant and visible minority community members.

9. **Support advocacy:**
 - Strengthen the capacity of charitable non-profit agencies to continue to play a leadership role in advocating with respect to issues of concern to immigrant and visible minority communities. This would include a funding and resource framework which would enable organizations to move beyond survival mode.
 - Complete the process of regulatory changes with respect to charitable status;
 - Identify key leaders in various immigrant and visible minority communities and provide opportunities for them to connect;
 - Increase community development support for small groups to assist them in identifying their own priorities, discussing strategies for making change, and participating in meaningful ways in related policy discussions;
 - Improve information sharing, access to relevant data, and networking opportunities;
 - Improve supports for skill building with respect to advocacy.

Appendix 1 Methodology

The research began with three focus groups, exploring participants' definition and identification of « assets » within their communities. Participants were also asked for ideas of advocacy strategies and information which would be useful to gather in the project. Focus group participants were drawn from organizations and programs serving immigrant and visible minority community members in the three priority areas (housing, employment / income, and access to services) and who were known as key players in their work. A total of twenty four people participated in the focus groups.

The focus groups were followed with a literature review to gather information from existing research on assets within Ottawa's diverse communities, and to better understand the concept and application of asset mapping.

The main research tool was a survey, modified from templates developed by The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, and based on the input from the focus groups. The survey was distributed broadly through the community by mail, using contact lists of immigrant and visible minority serving organizations. The sample was expanded using the « snowball » technique, in which initial contacts were asked whom else should be included in the sample in order to properly identify assets. This sampling process is based on a concept within asset mapping whereby participants in the research define assets. The result of this technique is that some of the assets included in this research are organizations or initiatives which are not exclusively or primarily focussed on serving immigrant or visible minority community members, but which are seen by these groups as important assets.

96 survey responses were received, from a total distribution of 220.⁵⁰ Responses were either by return mail or by follow-up phone contact in which the project coordinator filled in the survey with participants. This is a very good response rate⁵¹ which provides a reliable overview of the assets in Ottawa's diverse communities and their challenges. The respondents are from a broad cross section of organizations, from informal with no cash budget to established organizations with a budget of over a million dollars, some established in each of the decades from 1960 onward, organizations serving diverse populations, ages and dealing with a variety of issues.

The final stage of the research was a series of key informant interviews, flowing from information received on the survey. The interviews were intended to gather « lessons learned » from some initiatives in the community which community members had identified as significant. The purpose of this part of the research was to offer examples of « best practices » from a community perspective (distinct from the common academic

⁵⁰ It is estimated that there are roughly 300 community based organizations serving immigrant and visible minority residents in Ottawa. However, it was not possible to find current contact information for all.

⁵¹ Three factors were identified which had a negative impact on the response rate. First, much of the contact information on the initial lists proved to be out of date, reflecting constant change in informal organizations. Second, there was some concern among some potential respondents with respect to the reason for gathering the information, particularly in the post-9 / 11 context. Third, a written survey in English or French is not the most accessible process for gathering information from diverse groups, with different cultures and languages.

understanding of « best practices »), in order that community groups could learn from the success of others. This approach flows from the asset based concept which proposes that « ...any community based effort to solve problems must begin by recognizing the creative power of a community's formal and informal associations . »⁵²

The particular examples profiled in this report are only a very small sampling of 'best practices' or 'successes' in Ottawa. The examples are in no way a comprehensive listing, and do not in any way reflect a ranking by participants. The specific examples were selected to highlight diverse strategies used to address the key issues in the research (housing, access to services and employment, and advocacy).

⁵² Kretzman, John P. And McKnight, John L., Voluntary Associations in Low Income Neighbourhoods: An Unexplored Community Resource. Evanston, IL, The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, no date., page 1-2.

Appendix 2 Networks Identified

- ACCESS Committee
- B'nai Brith Council
- Canadian Alliance on Visible Minorities
- Canadian Council of Muslim Women
- Canadian Council on Refugees
- Canadian Standard on Cultural Interpreting
- Chinese Canadian National Council
- Coalition nationale des organismes de femmes immigrantes francophones de minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles
- Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres
- Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario
- International Women's Day (8 March) Coalition
- Jewish Community Council
- Multicultural Health Coalition
- National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- Regional Coordinating Committee to End Violence Against Women
- Vietnamese Canadian Federation

Appendix 3 A Sample of Success Stories

There are hundreds of success stories in Ottawa of the assets developed by immigrant and visible minority communities. From the survey response alone there would be at least some two hundred remarkable stories to be told, all describing successful strategies and best practices based on the communities' definitions of success. From among those, it is very hard to select only a few. However, the project did not have the resources to describe every asset in detail. The particular examples profiled here are only a very small sampling. They are certainly not intended as a comprehensive listing, and do not in any way reflect a ranking by participants or the researchers. The specific examples were selected only as a means to highlight different strategies and approaches used to address the key issues in the research, specifically housing, access to services, employment / income, and advocacy. They are listed in the order in which they are mentioned in the body of the report.

1. The Foreign Trained Teachers Project (Sponsored by World Skills)

Building on the skills and education of immigrants

Many immigrants come to Canada with the belief that their skills are in high demand, and that they will contribute to the Canadian economy while building a better life for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, upon arrival, many find that their qualifications are not recognized, their experience is ignored, and their skills are unused by Canadian employers who have never been to those countries to evaluate their credentials.

The Foreign Trained Teachers Program accelerates the accreditation of teachers licensed in other countries. Candidates are selected by World Skills and referred to the one-year re-certification program to complete the training, and be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers for teaching in Canadian schools. The project is provided in partnership with Queen's University.

World Skills also actively identifies, prepares and presents immigrant candidates to prospective employers. New Canadians attend job fairs, and are introduced to one-on-one meetings to be linked successfully to meaningful job opportunities. The initiative has interested mainstream partners, the City of Ottawa Workforce Development Strategy and the United Way of Ottawa to collaborate with World Skills, helping a total of 1,300 people find employment in 2003.

2. *Mentorship Programs and Homework Clubs*

Students volunteering to help younger students

In 2002, some Somali parents raised concerns about a disturbingly low admission of Somali youth to the University of Ottawa. Less than 1% of the university population of 30,000 was Somali youth. In response to this concern, the Somali Student Association organized a mentorship program for Somali high school students. In partnership with Carleton University's Centre for Initiatives in Education, Somali students attending the University of Ottawa and Carleton University established mentoring systems for students at two local high schools, which included tutoring by the university students. Today dozens of informal homework clubs like these two have been created throughout Ottawa where there are distinct needs to help Somali and other groups of high school students to succeed in their schooling.

3. *Centre d'intégration, de formation et de développement économique (CIFODE)*

Francophone immigrant women sharing skills to secure jobs and start businesses

CIFODE is an association which helps isolated Francophone immigrant women integrate into the workforce, provide them training to secure jobs and enhance their incomes.

CIFODE started with the creativity of one immigrant woman, Myriam Bile. Myriam came to Canada in the 1980s with a diploma in nursing and five years of work experience from Somali. Like many foreign trained professionals, Myriam dreamed of being able to practice in her profession once in Canada. She faced the cold reality of her credentials not being recognized, and not obtaining any job in the field of her training. After obtaining a Canadian diploma in social work, she organized with a group of immigrant women an organization to help new immigrant women facing the same situation she had encountered. Myriam and the women approached the Community Economic Development Network of Ottawa for help and created CIFODE to support isolated but skilled Francophone immigrant women in the Ottawa area, to get employment experience and to contribute to the economic development of their community.

"When you are a newcomer, you need a network. It is very important to have work experience, otherwise you will never get a job," Myriam says.

Many of the women were especially interested in developing community economic development programs related to food and catering. CIFODE has helped a group of Somali women create Cooperative Jana which produces packaged frozen samosas, and delivers them to restaurants, cafeterias and grocery stores throughout Ottawa and Gatineau. Women involved with Coop Jana later opened the Jana Restaurant, specializing in Somali food. The restaurant was very successful for a time, but like many restaurants on the City, it did not survive in the long term. CIFODE has also helped a group of Tunisian women create le Service de traiteur de Beldajia, fine cuisine tropicale that provides catering services of healthy tropical dishes to meetings and banquets.

CIFODE continues to provide employment and small business development support to immigrant women working to improve their incomes.

4. *The Women's Box*
(Based at Carlington Community Health Centre)

Community based access to small amounts of capital

Carlington Women's Box was created by the Somali women in partnership with the Carlington service providers. Based on the tradition of loan circles very popular in some developing countries, a group of women make a commitment to contribute any little amount of money they wish to the Women's Box, to serve as their common safety fund. Should a woman need emergency money to pay first and last month rent, or other extraordinary costs, she can borrow from the Women's Box and repay later.

5. *The Multifaith Housing Initiative*

*Mobilizing the resources of faith communities and their members
to create affordable housing*

The Multifaith Housing Initiative aims at bringing together interested people from different religions and faiths to work on a common vision of providing adequate, accessible, and affordable housing to low income people of any background.

In early 2000, the Social Justice Commission of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa realized that there was a great need for affordable housing in Ottawa. A committee was set up to meet with people who work with the homeless and those providing emergency shelter. The committee became aware that there were other groups with a similar concern. Thus they decided to create a Housing Committee in 2000, which initially comprised only representatives from Christian churches and organizations working on housing issues. Beginning in 2001, members from other faith communities joined in, and the committee changed its name to the Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI).

With a grant from the Community Foundation of Ottawa, the MHI and Housing Help conducted a study on home sharing to identify opportunities for members of faith communities to use their own housing to assist others in the community. Since then, MHI has partnered with St. John's Church in downtown Ottawa to build a condominium with 119 one-bedroom units on the church parking lot. Faith communities are being encouraged to buy up to 40 of the units with donations and loans from their members, and to rent those units to low-income households at affordable rents. Thanks to an interest-free loan of \$150,000 from an elderly couple, MHI is now able to take off with its project of buying 40 units to make it affordable rental housing for the low-income people.

MHI continues to encourage faith communities to take action in a variety of ways to provide housing in inclusive, healthy neighbourhoods.

6. *Active Jewish Adults 50+ (AJA 50+)*

Enhancing existing housing and other assets in the community to meet distinct needs

In response to an increasing number of inquiries, Jewish Family Services convened a Task Force on Seniors in June 1999 to examine their needs. The Task Force published three reports, one of which was "Retirement Housing for Adults over 55". The report highlighted that Jewish well elderly in Ottawa were in need of seniors' housing in a Jewish milieu, both of independent and assisted living types and for a range of economic levels.

Out of this, the organization AJA 50+ was born in June 2000. It formed a consortium of private developers and non-profit organizations to find a creative solution to the complex housing needs of Jewish seniors. AJA 50+ received a grant from Homegrown Solutions, funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to conduct a feasibility study of various options for meeting the housing needs of Ottawa's Jewish seniors; and to develop a vision with the community for meeting these needs. The vision is a multi-year plan which encompasses and accommodates the range of health and income needs in the Jewish seniors population, and includes:

- a) Pursuing linkages with existing housing providers, including operators of retirement facilities, to create a comfortable Jewish environment for Jewish residents in their buildings;
- b) Establishing a Housing Committee whose mandate includes exploring opportunities to develop non-profit housing with a Jewish milieu;
- c) Encouraging the development of affordable housing in proximity to synagogues;
- d) Examining the impact on Jewish seniors of policies related to low cost housing;
- e) Identify other housing for seniors in a Jewish community context (for example, in proximity to important community spaces);
- f) Liaising with Jewish community organizations which provide services to seniors, to share information, particularly with respect to appropriate supports to assist vulnerable seniors to remain in their own home.

The learnings and methodology from the project are useful to other ethnocultural and religious groups seeking to meet the distinct housing needs of their seniors.

7. *Immigrant Women Services Ottawa (IWSO)*

Creating positive changes in women's lives.

Immigrant Women Services Ottawa (IWSO), formerly, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women Against Abuse (IVMWAA), was founded in March 1988 in response to the need for culturally appropriate services for immigrant women victims of domestic violence. A Crisis Counselling Service and a Cultural Interpretation Service were implemented in 1989. Initially the crisis counseling service was offered to women victims from South and Latin America, Vietnamese, English and French speaking women. This service gradually expanded to include many other languages and today is staffed by 6 women who between them speak over 16 languages. The Cultural Interpretation Service, now renamed Language Interpretation Service, is critical in helping immigrant women access community services.. A pool of interpreters speaking more than 50 languages and dialects facilitate the communication between a woman victim and her service provider

e.g. the police service, private lawyers, legal aid, transition house, or the Victim Witness Assistance Program (Ottawa Court). All interpreters **must** complete a standardized provincial curriculum developed by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and pass a test at the end of the training, before working as an interpreter.

IWSO's integrated model of service is unique as viewed by many of its international guests who have sought ideas from the agency. IWSO is dedicated to creating positive changes in women's lives. Our efforts help them find ways to end the violence in their lives, achieve their full potential and become productive members of society.

8. The Host Program

(Sponsored by Catholic Immigration Centre)

*Using volunteers to assist individuals in their settlement process
and to educate the broader community*

The Host Program of the Catholic Immigration Centre is a non-religious program which recruits and trains volunteers in Ottawa to become Canadian friends, or "hosts" to new immigrants and refugees of all ages. Hosts are individuals, families or groups who are open to learn and appreciate people of other cultures and are willing to share their own cultural background. They are recruited to:

- Promote and help new immigrants and refugees adjust to the new life by giving them orientation about Canadian life, supporting them in their practice of the language, and helping with educational or employment goals;
- Sensitize the community to the needs of newcomers and invite others to be hosts.

Each year, the program has exceeded its goal of making at least 300 matches. The Host Program benefits not only newcomers, but other Ottawa residents, by building friendships with newcomers, and learning to see Canada through the eyes of a newcomer.

9. Community Health and Resource Centres

*Adapting services to meet the needs
of immigrant and visible minority community members*

There are fifteen community health and resource centres in Ottawa. From one end of the city to the other, these centres have adapted to offer health, community development and / or social services to the diverse populations in their catchment areas.

Volunteers and staff at community health and resource centres reach out and join with community members to bring innovative programs and to create vibrant partnerships. Some of the programs which were identified as assets during the research include:

- For women: Healthy Baby clinics and Better Beginnings programs run by and for immigrant women to address the new context where family support is absent; Community kitchens for socializing and preparing low cost, nutritious meals; Money lending circles; Mental health outreach programs which respect traditional approaches to health; Information on abuse of women; Health information programs in many languages.

- For parents: Pre-school drop-ins, Multicultural parenting programs, Programs for children and parents who have witnessed war and trauma.
- For children and youth: Recreation, lifeskills and healthy living programs; Homework clubs, tutoring and mentoring programs.
- For seniors: culturally appropriate exercise programs, cooking classes, social opportunities; health education in many languages;

Workers from these centres also provide community development support to immigrant and visible minority groups and individuals (among others) to build a healthy community.

10. The Community Houses, featuring Debra Dynes Family House

A place for community members to give and receive help

Debra Dynes Family House is a small multi-service centre in a low income social housing neighbourhood. There are 800 residents in the community, 500 of them children, and there are no city services nearby. On a typical day, 150 - 200 people access the Family House for services.

From early morning, the phone never stops ringing. The volunteers are there to pick up bread and bags of food left at the doorstep for the food bank and the emergency baby cupboard. The newspapers arrive for the ESL classes. Strollers start to line up outside the building. A community member arrives with lunch for the group: tabouleh, fried cauliflower and kibbeh. Someone else has the photos back from last week's Dragon Boat Race led by volunteer youth. A young woman has offered to take a neighbour's child to a kindergarten readiness program, for the child's benefit and to give the mother a break. What a great reminder of what strong residents are building and how willing they are to help!

In the meantime, Barbara Carroll, the coordinator, has to reply to a ton of emails and write many reports, or they won't get their grant money. Today she got the bad news that after five years of running a very innovative program, it is to be classed as a recreation program and will lose its subsidies. About the project, Barbara comments:

"We get \$3,800 to run a program for 40 weeks; which costs out at 59 cents per child. The city says they are out money. When will people start to think outside of a narrow definition and realize how much more is going on in these programs? Why are our children and families, who struggle every day with enormous stress and no money, not worth it? When will someone realize that a youth outreach worker, working full time, costs far less than one weekend's work by police, and is far more effective? I have the privilege of every day working with people who never give up and are making their voices heard. We are working together and one way or another, we will continue to fight for what is needed. We are fighting for an increase in coordination dollars. We can't keep doing this on a \$40,000 one-time grant! One thing is for sure, the city manager will really get to hear what this House means to the people here!"

This community never fails to impress: the people's energy, their strength and their commitment to their House is everywhere. Community members use the Family House but also facilitate and support programs, always giving feedback, shaping the direction for the community and what they can do to improve their quality of life. Great young people and students work everyday as program supports. This community has so much to be proud of: changing from a reputed drug area into a winner of awards for outstanding neighbourhood achievement.

11. Cultural Interpretation Service of Ottawa (CISOC)

*A service started by immigrant women
to help immigrants access mainstream community services*

CISOC is a well recognized and well used community-based cultural interpretation service in Ottawa, providing the highest quality of interpretation and translation to health and social service agencies and other public services to enable them to communicate with their immigrant users.

CISOC was initiated by the Cultural Interpretation and Translation Committee of the Ethnic and Visible Minority Forum, an initiative sponsored by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton (SPC). In July 1989, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women Against Abuse (IVMWAA) was established and one of the services offered was the Cultural Interpretation Service, a service which continues today but is renamed Language Interpretation Service (LIS). IVMWAA provided both generic and wife abuse specific interpretation. In 1991, the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton began purchasing cultural interpretation services from IVMWAA. In February 1991, the SPC and the United Way / Centraide Ottawa collaborated on the report "Strengthening the Network", which led to the development of the "Forum on Services to Ethnic and Visible Minorities". A sub-committee – the Cultural Interpretation and Translation Committee (CITC) was formed later that month. The CITC recommended a community-based generic cultural interpretation service with strong links to IVMWAA. In January 1992, Gentium Consulting was contracted to produce a study entitled, "Cultural Interpretation Services: Needs and Strategies for Implementation in the Ottawa Carleton Region". In September 1992, funding for CISOC was received from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Multilingual Access to Social Services Initiative), under the sponsorship of the SPC and IVMWAA. On September 7, 1993 CISOC began offering services and IVMWAA's on-call interpreters were assigned to CISOC.

CISOC cultural interpreters do more than provide interpretation. The cultural interpreter sensitizes the service provider to the cultural traditions and values that are reflected in the immigrant's responses when meeting with mainstream services. As well the cultural interpreter helps the service user to understand the new system, environment and values, besides addressing the language barrier.

Today the cultural interpretation service is an independent service operated by immigrant women for the benefit of the community in Ottawa. Service users include the City of Ottawa people's services, the Ottawa hospital, the police and court services, the legal aid services, and shelters for women.

12. Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLO)

(Sponsored by Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO))

Using community members to bridge the gap between immigrants and the school system

OCISO developed the MLO program to help parents, students and teachers to bridge the gap of cultural among students of various cultures. The program started in Ottawa-Carleton School Board in 1991, and has been very successful, and popular across the province. Today, through funding from the school boards, United Way, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, OCISO provides 16 workers speaking more than 20 languages to 29 English and French schools in Ottawa. They help with everything from translations to language training, from career planning to culture shock. They help parents to be more actively involved in their children's education, and support educational staff to understand the children and families. The students can get help from the MLOs when they are feeling isolated.

School boards in Toronto and Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo, as well as in the state of Vermont, USA, have adopted the model. The program won the 1994 International Institute for Innovation's Peter F. Drucker Award for a Canadian Non-Profit Innovation and the 2003 Award of Honour from the Canada Race Relations Foundation.

13. Multicultural Health Coalition

Networking to ensure mainstream services meet the needs of immigrant communities

The Multicultural Health Coalition started in 1997, following an open house between the Health Department, ethnic communities and community health/resource centres on addressing the health needs of the multicultural communities. Eight multicultural associations participated and expressed strong support for increased liaison between mainstream agencies and ethnic communities, increased culturally appropriate services, and the promotion of health to multicultural communities. Common goals, focused task and shared resources is an important factor in keeping the coalition working successfully. The coalition has been able to obtain approximately \$200,000 to increase access in the community. The Coalition frequently represents multicultural communities on advisory and working groups across the City.

14. Somali Women's Info Hotline

Immigrant women advocating to preserve a service important to them

Carlington Community Health Centre started an Info Hotline in Somali language for Somali women to call for information or when they have emergencies, especially when they are in isolation and face a situation of violence. The Hotline includes a series of information messages to Somali women, in their own language, about current available programs and services across the city. The Info Hotline is available 24 hours a day. In 2004 women in the community heard that the Hotline was going to close because of lack of funding. Somali women in the community began phoning the Mayor's office to explain how important the Hotline was to them. This was the first time many of these women had become involved with local politicians. The Hotline has remained open.

15. A City for All Women

Involving all women in advocacy for access to services

The "City for All Women" Initiative is a project to identify ways of ensuring that women and men in Ottawa have equal opportunity to make and influence decisions about our city. Through the leadership of the Working Group on Women's Access to Municipal Services, women from diverse backgrounds are supported to work in partnership with municipal staff and politicians to identify ways of ensuring women's access to services.

The initiative started with a research project to gather the perspectives of a broad diversity of women on their ability to access municipal government services. From the research a series of recommendations were developed and brought before Council for approval. The group has continued to work on the implementation of the recommendations, by continuing to build the capacity of all women in the City to advocate for better access. They provide training and other supports to individuals to help them to get involved in advocacy on issues of concern to them. The group is particularly concerned to ensure that women who face additional barriers get access to services (for example, women from racialized communities).

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