

Poor Immigrants in Canada: Are they working? A Community Perspective

Report to the 11th International Metropolis
Conference:
October 2-6 2006: Lisbon, Portugal

The observations in this report represent the findings from a series of focus groups and conversations at St Christopher House with staff and outside experts, as well as recent and longer term immigrants (sponsored refugees, family class, and independent immigrants). As such, the findings represent the informed views of these individuals and the results should not be construed to be scientific or definitive nor do they represent the full array of recent immigrant experience either in the St Chris catchment or in Canada.

However, the St Chris participants' experience and views represent a broad range of immigrant experience and opinion and each of the staff participants has maintained and currently maintains daily personal and/or professional contact with immigrants in the context of community programs that serve the needs of recent and non-recent immigrants in West End Toronto.

**John Stapleton and Odete Nascimento
St. Christopher House
Toronto, Canada
November, 2006**

Poor Immigrants: Are they working? Report Summary

This report:

- Illustrates how different groups of recent immigrants fare in the labour market
- Shares the perceptions and analyses of immigrants about their living conditions
- Identifies factors that make immigrants resilient or vulnerable to poverty; and
- Identifies possible policy responses to address poverty amongst recent immigrant families.

We convened immigrants and staff at St Christopher House and related agencies to identify and understand the perceived causes of poverty amongst working-age immigrants.

St. Christopher House used the approach that the lived experience of community members must inform and validate social policy development.

We compiled relevant research about immigrants, their employment experiences and their incomes. We conducted a series of focus groups with recent immigrants in the community as well as with staff. We documented their stories, experiences, perceptions and analyses. We presented initial results to a representative group of project participants and staff for additional feedback

The report (and a separate PowerPoint presentation):

- Canvasses key literature and articles on working poverty and immigrant poverty in Canada including Statistics Canada dataset, HRSD research, PRI evaluations and research and the CIC (IMDB) datasets.
- Identifies findings of the focus groups and compares and contrasts this material to the formal research and evaluations identified above.
- Provides qualitative analysis of the working-age immigrant communities in the St Christopher catchment along with narratives and other illustrative material.
- Offers case studies of typical situations that show both successes and barriers, intended and unintended consequences as well as personal, family and community responses to both success and failures respecting escape from poverty; and
- Recommends changes to:
 - Reduce barriers to better paid work
 - Reduce the time immigrants spend in poverty
 - Identify problems that keep working-age immigrants from working; and
 - Inventory methods and approaches that facilitate wage progression.

The St. Christopher consultations resulted in the following findings on how recent immigrants fare in the labour market:

An All or Nothing approach to work - an orientation to accept better jobs or no employment among poor recent immigrants who rely on social services programs

- **The Big Income Mix** - The reality that paid employment is only one way in which recent immigrants are paid for the labour. The other two forms of compensation are 'under the table' work and 'contract' income
- **The Employment Double-Up** – Working at two or more low income jobs is common among recent immigrant especially on those who feel an obligation to 'send money back home'.
- **'Leaping out'** - Many skilled immigrants, especially those with verified credentials often leap out to good jobs that allow them to escape working poverty.
- **'Starting Over'** - Many skilled immigrants with unrecognized credentials choose to become re-credentialed rather than entering the paid job market at lower wages
- **Depression and Immobilization** – Many new immigrants with high hopes for their life in Canada become depressed and immobilized when they see that their prospects and the difficulties in achieving their goals becoming elusive.
- **New Waves of Immigrants** – Many new immigrants are much more educated than previous waves of immigrants and may be withdrawing from the labour market early and doing better later when they are able to get untracked.

Two other observations are:

- **The 'Astronaut' Phenomenon** – Many new immigrants go back to their home countries where they find it easier to make a living and subsidize their families who remain in Canada where the other spouse – usually the mother – does not work. They are called 'astronauts' because they are frequent flyers – often across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
- **Disposition towards Canada** – Many immigrants who immigrate to Canada do not intend to remain in Canada and wish to make as much money as they can in a short period of time. This means they often may not build their credentials and take more short term routes to amassing wealth. Many may fit into the double-up phenomenon noted above.

Barriers and Enablers to better living conditions

- Family support
- Community Support
- Community Self Protection
- Inter and Intra-cultural and ethnic racism and gender discrimination

Poor Immigrants: Are they working?

Background

1. A Lasting Impression: Recent Immigrant who work are working poor

In a recent CBC report on the progress of recent immigrants¹, the CBC gave the impression that recent immigrants to Canada were over-represented in the working poor population when they noted that recent immigrants obtain lower-paid jobs than non-immigrants and previous immigrants to Canada:

“Recent immigrants to Canada as well as refugees often come to this country to start a new life. Unfortunately, despite the fact that they are often very well educated, the job market is not as hopeful and welcoming as they may have hoped. 70.3 per cent of new immigrants found it difficult to enter the labour market. Statistics Canada's latest report on Labour Market entry (2001)² for new immigrants found that 70.3 per cent of them complained that it was difficult to enter the labour market.

The same report also said that 85 per cent of immigrants came here with every intention of working. Four out of 10 of these newly arrived people found jobs within six months, leaving the other 60 per cent to struggle to pay rent and buy food.

Because so many new immigrants are not finding jobs they are qualified for in Canada, they are often forced to find alternate low-paying jobs. According to Statistics Canada, 60 per cent of new immigrants worked in a different field than they had before arriving in Canada.

About 13 per cent of immigrant men worked in management positions before they came to Canada, but only 4 per cent of them worked as managers once they lived here.

Even educated immigrants were not guaranteed equivalent jobs to the ones they left to come to Canada. Only 40 per cent of new immigrants with foreign credentials had their qualifications validated here.”

Census 2001 data from Statistics Canada also tends to leave the impression that recent immigrants are particularly likely to be members of the working Poor³:

¹ CBC reports frequently on the progress of recent immigrant. See www.cbc.ca/paidtobepoor/immigrants

² <http://www.cbc.ca/paidtobepoor/glossary.html#statscan>

³ Immigrants in Canada: Census 2001 Highlights; Statistics Canada

“...the relative gap between recent immigrants and the Canadian-born widened. Whereas in 1980, a male immigrant who had been in Canada 10 years earned an average of \$1.04 for every dollar earned by his Canadian-born counterpart, the figure had dropped to \$0.90 by 1990 and \$0.80 by 2000.”

According to Human Resources and Social Development Canada, recent immigrants are indeed over-represented among the working poor. However, most of them do not live in poverty, and for those who do, financial poverty may also be the result of difficulties in participating or in securing enough hours in the “regulated” labour market. As a result, many recent immigrants living in poverty simply do not cumulate enough hours of work to be considered working poor.”⁴

2. St Christopher House Approach: Look to the Lived Experience of Community members⁵

St. Christopher House is a community agency with origins as a settlement house. The approach taken to gain insights into the phenomenon of poverty and working poverty amongst recent immigrants was as follows:

We convened immigrants and staff at St Christopher House and related agencies to identify and understand the perceived causes of poverty amongst working-age immigrants. Issues that were canvassed included but were not limited to:

- the perceptions of immigrants
- the goals and aspirations of immigrants to settle and work in Canada and how they perceive others, especially employers
- the education and training of immigrants prior to their arrival in Canada
- the perceived role of racism and discrimination in their poverty and in under-employment or unemployment
- perceived language, literacy and other “essential skills” barriers
- perceived difficulties in cultural acclimatization
- The differences between groups of immigrants, e.g. by nation of origin, by family or household composition, by gender, by age groups etc.

St. Christopher House used the approach that the lived experience of community members must inform and validate social policy development. ⁶

We compiled relevant research about immigrants, their employment experiences and their incomes.

⁴ HRSD research documents(forthcoming).

⁵ See Appendix 1: Introduction to St Christopher House

⁶ The immigrant profiles in the text boxes throughout this report represent real people but names and minor details have been changed except in those instances where specific permission was given to the authors by the persons to use their name and situation details.

Through July and early August 2006, the project principals and multilingual staff conducted a series of focus groups with recent immigrants in the community as well as with staff. The main topic was the question of high representation of working-age immigrants among the poor and the working poor.

In the focus groups and key informant interviews, we asked about:

- The perceptions of immigrants about their representation among the poor and the working poor
- The goals and aspirations of immigrants to settle and work in Canada and how they perceive others, especially employers
- The education and training of immigrants prior to their arrival in Canada
- The perceived role of racism and discrimination in their poverty and in under-employment or unemployment
- Perceived language, literacy and other “essential skills” barriers
- Perceived difficulties in cultural acclimatization
- The differences, if any, between groups of immigrants, e.g. by nation of origin, by family or household composition, by gender, by age groups etc.

We documented their stories, experiences, perceptions and analyses. We presented initial results to a representative group of project participants and staff for additional feedback. The results of these discussions are documented in the Discussion and Analysis sections of the report.

Discussion and Analysis

1. **The All or Nothing approach to work** – This is an orientation to accept better jobs or no employment among recent immigrants who rely on social services programs.

It has often been noted by economists that marginal effective tax rates are highest among the poor, especially those benefiting from more than one social service and income security programs where income testing is the rule.⁷ The reason for this is that each program tends to reduce benefits often based on the same increases in outside income. This means that for each dollar earned by multiply-served new immigrants in Toronto:

- Social assistance is reduced by 50 cents on the dollar
- Public Housing rents go up by 30 cents on the dollar
- Work expenses must be paid (e.g. transportation, clothes)
- Child care expenses rise while the subsidy reduces at \$20,000 a year
- Student loans are potentially jeopardized; and
- National Child Benefit Supplements go down.

In a recent parallel meeting with a number of Somali women on these issues in July 2006 in North Etobicoke, a budgeting exercise was undertaken where it became clear that single parents with more than four children receiving social assistance had as much disposable income as one woman who had secured a job paying \$36,000 a year. In the latter case, the woman's rent soared to the market rate of \$1,200 per month while those women remaining on social assistance experienced rents in the \$200 range. While on social assistance, there is also little pressure to send money back home. This is not the case if a job is secured. The women receiving social assistance received premium free prescription drugs, had no work expenses or child care costs, received full social assistance, back to school and winter clothing benefits, as well as free dental care for their children.

The woman working at \$36,000 paid for part of her prescription drugs, paid all of her children's dental bills and received no back to school and winter clothing benefits. Her child care subsidy was reduced to zero and although she did not experience the NCBS clawback, her NCBS benefits were reduced by more than the amount clawed back from the other women receiving assistance. In many ways she was worse off than the women receiving full social assistance. She retained her public housing unit as her job is precarious and if she moved out (to a market apartment) and lost her job, her rent would remain at market levels rather than falling dramatically with a loss in income.

There was no material benefit for any of the women in this group to take work that would place them in the working poor category. Each would be clearly worse off. For the social assistance recipients, each will remain in poverty with little chance to escape until their children have grown.

⁷ For a full discussion of these dynamics, see Gillian Manning and Don Drummond: The Road Still less Traveled, Toronto Dominion Bank – TD Economics, September 2005.

2. **The Big Income Mix** – The reality that paid employment is only one way in which recent immigrants are paid for the labour. The other two forms of compensation are ‘under the table’ work and ‘contract’ income.

Many immigrants either choose or are forced to work in jobs in the cash economy or for contract income⁸. Some combine wage income with contract income and under the table income while others engage in other combinations of wage and non-wage employment.

In some of these situations, recent immigrants do not work sufficient regulated hours to be considered as a worker and be eligible for income transfers.⁹

In Ontario where the overall working age adult population is approximately 8.2 million persons:

- Almost 5.5 million persons work in the wage sector; but
- The labour force is approximately 7.0 million persons.

This means that approximately:

- 1.5 million working age adults are either self employed or are temporarily unemployed while
- 1.2 million Working age adults are outside of the labour force (including stay at home parents and students).

Of these 2.7 million working age adults, many will be persons who work in:

- contractual arrangements where they are not in an employer-employee relationship while
- Others will be working in the cash economy.

The St. Christopher focus groups consisting of immigrant staff who work in immigrant services noted that the number of recent immigrants working for cash and for contractors is extremely significant and a long term phenomena.

Maria is a cleaning lady from the Portuguese community who works for cash. When she first came to Canada, she found the work to be easy to obtain and available. She can earn up to \$650 per week free and clear. She assumes wrongly that when she becomes too old to work as a cleaning lady for the families she now serves, she will be eligible for a disability pension and if she becomes unemployed, that she will be eligible for other programs. She does not realize that she will not obtain CPP. She is not in poverty but she does appear in poverty statistics as a poor person.

⁸ Many temporary employment agencies do not employ workers as wage earners. They are independent contractors who are self-employed and bill the agency for their work. Since there is no employer-employee relationship, the contractor does not enjoy legal protections afforded to wage-earners. They also are not obligated to pay into CPP or EI.

⁹ See Fleury and Fortin (2006) – *When Working is not enough to Escape Poverty*.

The presence of the underground economy means that:

- the amount of immigrants who are actually working and who would otherwise be counted in the working poor population is underreported; but
- It also means that immigrants who have a mix of wage and under the table employment sources are actually faring economically better than official statistics would suggest.

It is worthy of note that the system of tax and income security benefits have eroded significantly in Ontario and Canada making the lure of the underground economy and contract income much more attractive.

In the past, many employees would not give up wage employment nor take cash payments for work as it meant that EI benefits would be unavailable. The threshold hours now required for EI eligibility are now so high (especially for recent immigrants) that eligibility for EI benefits does not figure into the equation in a significant way.

Similarly, language, program complexity and cultural barriers often mean that new immigrants are unaware of the long term implications of not paying into the Canada Pension Plan (especially). In other instances, persons who work in the cash economy who turn 65 often realize similar incomes to person who have paid into CPP due to the availability of GIS income.

3. **The Employment Double-Up** – Working at two or more low-income jobs is common among recent immigrants especially on those who feel an obligation to ‘send money back home’.

The employment double-up is a fairly common situation among recent immigrants. Among minimum wage employees especially, a common concern is the number of hours available to work to get ahead and meet the responsibilities that are often placed on recent immigrants. In many cases, they are not only expected to support their families, but also send money home.

With the employment double up, four scenarios are likely:

- Where both jobs are wage employment, income is sufficient to allow the person to arise out of working poverty and poverty per se.
- Where either job is under the table, there may be no wage employment at all.
- Where one of the jobs is wage employment or contract and the other is under the table, it is often the case that the wage employment and contract employment does not secure the threshold hours required to be considered as a worker and be eligible to government benefits.

- Where one job is full time wage employment or contract at low wages, and the other job is under the table. In this case, the second job does not show up in official statistics as improving the income of the recent immigrants.

In scenario one, the recent immigrant do not live in poverty, and thus, is not a working poor person. In the second scenario, the recent immigrants can be considered in statistics as being poor but not working poor. In scenarios three and four, depending on the level of earnings officially declared, the recent immigrant can or can not be considered as living in poverty. However, it is only in the fourth scenario that the immigrant may show up in official statistics as working poor. The St. Christopher House focus groups saw this as significant and related experiences with people who fit in all four categories. However, the first three scenarios were believed to be ‘common’.

Ella and Beverley both work the morning shift at a well know coffee chain. They both work from 6:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m five days a week. They emigrated from the Philippines a few years ago.

Getting to know the people in the area, they discovered that there was cleaning work available in a nearby office building from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. It started out as a contract relationship but after the contract ended, they were offered and accepted cash payments which improved their take home pay by more than 20%.

Both Ella and Beverley have been able to move closer to their work, live in better apartments and have resumed sending money back to help loved ones back home. They have their afternoons off but work 55 hours a week on an ongoing basis. They both note that they “won’t be able to do this forever” – “we are always exhausted.” Both see EI* and CPP* as additional taxes for which neither believes they will ever qualify in any significant way.

Ella and Beverley are considered to be working poor but have real incomes that take them out of poverty. They both have friends with similar incomes who work at two or more under the table jobs and know still others who work at two regular wage-earning jobs. These friends have real incomes that take them out of poverty yet some are not considered to be working at all while others are considered to be working at wages that take them out of poverty.

4. **'Leaping out'** - Many skilled immigrants, especially those with verified credentials often leap out to good jobs that allow them to escape working poverty.

The issue of the lack of Canadian acceptance of foreign credentials has been well chronicled over the years.¹⁰ However, this does not mean that foreign workers do not eventually get untracked. In many instances, recent immigrants with good credentials spend time in ESL classes and learn the art of writing a resume¹¹ that will be useful and accepted in Canada.

These immigrants spend time making sure that their children are placed properly in schools and in many ways, sorting themselves out in a new country. During this time, they rely on savings while applying for jobs for which they are qualified. They do not take on work for which they are not qualified preferring to spend their time connecting with the right employer.

During the period of non-work, they learn who is providing reliable advice and who is not. Often, friends and relatives have outdated information while many immigrants have a high level of suspicion regarding formal job advertisements and the reliability of employment protections offered by government.

Usually within two years or so, skilled immigrants in this example will finally connect with an employer and obtain a job that moves them out of poverty often after enduring a great deal of hardship.

¹⁰ See Marcel Lauziere, Welcome to Canada: We lied about the opportunities, Globe and Mail, May 26, 2003

¹¹ Resumes of foreign professionals are often first completed in their home countries. The English is often poor and inappropriate. Concepts of concurrency of experience often lead job applicants to claim many more years of experience than they actually possess (e.g. three years of doing three tasks may be counted as nine years) leading prospective employers to believe that the applicant is much older than (s)he is in reality. These important nuances can have the effect of disqualifying the applicant for an interview without the applicant having any idea why (s) he did not get the interview.

Ming came to Canada with her husband and 8 year old son two years ago from mainland China. She has a long and exemplary record of employment insecurity software and has all the necessary certifications to work in a highly skilled job in a professional environment.

She paid hundred of dollars in China for an appropriate English resume. The resume is (unfortunately) almost incomprehensible and contains many idioms and statements that would make little sense to a Canadian employer. She persevered for several months with this resume until advice from many new friends and acquaintances she made in Canada forced her to reconsider a new resume. The resume had also listed concurrent experience as consecutive leading an employer to believe that she had 37 years of experience even though her age is 32. Employers may have legitimately believed that she was in her late 50's or early 60's which, in turn, may have reduced her chances for employment.

Ming did not apply for a number of jobs where her friends had told her that she must have Canadian citizenship. An employment counsellor told her that she only needed to obtain permanent residency status but she continued to believe her friends who had told her otherwise. Her friends were wrong but it took time for her to see the sources on which she should rely for correct advice.

After 13 months in Canada, she secured a job paying \$55,000 per year in the area of her expertise. At no time was Ming in the working poor population. ¹²

5. **'Starting Over'** - Many skilled immigrants with unrecognized credentials choose to become re-credentialed rather than entering the paid job market at lower wages

Unlike the above example where a person with foreign credentials is finally able to obtain employment, many recent immigrants with foreign credentials are faced with the prospect of being obligated to retrain and to re-establish their credentials in Canada. This is often a protracted and arduous process that takes the foreign professionals out of the labour force and makes them vulnerable to poverty for prolonged period of time before they are able to practise in their chosen profession.

It should be noted that the St Christopher House consultations noted that persons in certain 'hard' professions and trades (engineering, tool and die) may have an easier time of it because of:

- Labour shortages in key areas
- Less need to speak English (as they are less likely to be working with the public);
- Availability of clear and detailed testing to prove qualifications (less clear in the soft professions; and

¹² Members of the focus groups also made the point that resume preparation is overemphasized by the detriment of networking opportunities.

- Fewer risks; i.e. where failure to perform leads to immediate harm to people (e.g. medicine)

Professions such as medicine, law, economics and administration are difficult areas to re-establish credentials due to:

- The need to speak good English
- Lack of key labour shortages
- Differences in the teachings and execution of the professions themselves (e.g. Law)
- High risk to the public (i.e. the client) where failure to perform is the result
- Unavailability of definitive testing procedures to quickly re-establish credentials
- Gate keeping by professional organizations

It is in these latter set of professions where three courses of action occur:

- Full time engagement in re-qualification for the profession the new immigrant left
- Acceptance of a lower qualified position in the same field (lawyers and doctors who become paramedics and paralegals); and
- Ph.D.'s become taxi drivers.

It may be the case that only in this highly visible latter example that a recent immigrant with a profession would become a member of the working poor.

In the St. Christopher House consultations, we heard numerous examples of Brazilian lawyers who now hold paralegal positions,¹³ Argentinean business administrators who became administrative assistants, and Somalian doctors who become paramedics. Others are journalists who no longer practise their craft except as volunteers in their community.

For those who join the workforce at a lesser position, most appear to escape poverty. For those who go attempt to reclaim their profession, long sojourns from the work force are often taken.

¹³ the legal system in English Canada is different from the Brazilian and most Latin American countries)
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Consuela is an economist from Columbia. She arrived with her daughter a few years ago. She is estranged from her husband. She feels that she cannot return to Columbia and is passionate about establishing a safe environment and future for her daughter.

As an economist, her specialty is rural development where she has published many articles and is a recognized expert. There were no positions for her in Canada in the Universities and her skills in rural economic development do not translate well into the Canadian context. None of her articles have been translated from Spanish to English.

She works as a file clerk and administrative assistant but feels underutilized. These skills allow her to escape from poverty but she sees the limits of her background in rural economics and does not have the personal resources to have her articles translated into English. She has been accepted to go back to graduate school in Canada and plans to obtain another PhD in economics. She does not live in poverty but she is very close to a poverty line income for herself and her daughter.

6. **Depression and Immobilization** – Many new immigrants with high hopes for their life in Canada become depressed and immobilized when they see that achieving their goals becoming elusive.

Many recent immigrants to Canada arrive with high hopes of succeeding quickly in Canada. However many find that they are unable to succeed in the short terms. A new language is very hard to learn as an adult and these difficulties combined with job search barriers and lack of familiarity with Canada can cause both depression and long term immobilization among a significant number of newer immigrants who are better educated and whose expectation may be higher than was the case for earlier immigrant to Canada.

When depression is followed by immobilization, paid work can become a distant prospect and the only door to turn to is public assistance.

Depression and immobilization are not new amongst recent immigrants but its prevalence seems to be on the rise amongst newer immigrants who have more developed skill than in the past. They seem to have a harder time dealing with their perceived inability to get on with life in Canada.

Jussara is an immigrant from Brazil who works at St Christopher House. She lives with her husband and both came to Canada as professionals who expected to do well.

Jussara found it extremely difficult to learn English and realized that learning a language as a child is a very different proposition than learning a language as a mature adult. At times, she just found things to be unimaginably difficult and did not know if she could go on. She eventually overcame these difficulties but fully understands how people can become so depressed that they simply become immobilized and become long term social services recipients. She now assists immigrant and other children and women facing domestic violence.

The Immigration Database ¹⁴ shows that social assistance usage among immigrants had begun to show troubling increases in the 1990's compared with previous assessments of the progress of immigrants. Although social assistance programs were seriously curtailed in the late 1990's and early in the 2000's, recent immigrant usage remains disproportionately high.

In addition, the proportion of social assistance recipients who are now deemed 'hard to serve'¹⁵ has grown dramatically. Those in this group include recent immigrants who are immobilized and who have lost hope.

Today's immigrants tend to be better educated as more education and professional experience are often required to become an immigrant under Canada's point system. Whereas immigrants of a previous era were content to take any job for which they were capable, newer immigrants most often make an attempt to stay in the professions in which they were trained. The depression and immobilization that results from lack of success not only takes people out of the labour market entirely for a long period but can also result in the attainment of a better paid job for educated recent immigrants when they are finally able to get untracked. ¹⁶

7. **New Waves of Immigrants** – Many new immigrants are much more educated than previous waves of immigrants and may be withdrawing from the labour market early and doing better later.

In the St. Christopher consultations, many participants made the observation that the 'type of immigrant' coming to Canada now markedly differs from the immigrants who came to Canada ten and twenty years ago. They observed that the immigrant waves of the 1970's were different because:

- Immigration act requirements were different
- Worldwide settlement patterns have changed; and
- the political situation in various countries had changed

¹⁴ IMDB – Citizenship and Immigration Canada – The Economic performance of Immigrants: Education perspective- 1995

¹⁵ Persons who are deemed hard to serve in the context of welfare usage are those who have received welfare income for 24 consecutive months or more.

¹⁶ IMDB: "However, those with 10 to 12 years of education report roughly double the incidence (of welfare usage) 3 to 4 years after landing, falling to 1.5 times the incidence or better for those who have lived in Canada for 10 to 15 years".

Staff members immigrating from Uruguay, the former Yugoslavia, Brazil, and Portugal all noted that due to these various trends and changes, the one overall difference in common was that today's immigrant is much better educated and more likely to come from one of the following professions than was true of their counterparts in past decades:

- engineers
- lawyers
- economists
- teachers
- Social workers
- administrators; and
- accountants

“Do What We Did!”

One of the most important legacies of the waves of immigration that started with the less educated is that there appears to be an almost uniform expectation in immigrant communities that new immigrants ought to parallel the settlement experiences of their antecedents. In other words, if previous female immigrants in a particular community had started out their Canadian experience as cleaning ladies, then new immigrants ought to do the same thing. If the men worked in warehouses packing boxes, the new wave of immigrant ought to ‘pay their dues’ and do the same thing.

When newer immigrants do not choose the course of the previous wave, new tensions in the host community are created with accusations that the new immigrants think they are better or know more than those who populated the previous wave.

The disruptive effects on more highly educated recent immigrants, means that it takes longer for new immigrants to get untracked. It may mean as pointed out previously that more highly educated recent immigrants take more time to plan the establishment of their career while not working and then only taking steps to join the work force when they have a job in their profession, albeit at the lower echelons of their profession (e.g. paralegal work in the case of an immigrating lawyer).

B: Two other Observations

- 8. The Astronaut Phenomenon** – Many new immigrants go back to their home countries where they find it easier to make a living and subsidize their families who remain in Canada where the other spouse – usually the mother – does not work. They are called astronauts because they are frequent flyers – often across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Where new immigrant families decide that one spouse should return home in order to access a higher income, it is clear that the returning spouse is not part of the Canadian Labour market. It is equally clear that there will be less need for the parent left behind in Canada to access the labour market due to the flow of funds coming from the originating country.

This arrangement is not uncommon among Asian families who, like other recent immigrant families, place a high priority on quality education and access to premium free health care coverage.

9. **Disposition towards Canada** – Many immigrants who immigrate to Canada do not intend to remain in Canada and wish to make as much money as they can in a short period of time. This means they often may not build their credentials and take more short term routes to amassing wealth. Many may fit into the Double-up phenomenon noted above.

St. Christopher House consultations revealed mixed feelings on the issue of whether the immediate intent to remain in Canada is an important determinant in representation in the working poor population

The intent to return to one's home country may mean that more recent immigrant access the work force quickly but may work at two or more jobs and escape poverty and working poverty. However others who forego the attainment of credentials may miss the opportunity to stay out of poverty in the longer term.

It was also noted in the focus groups that the intent to remain in Canada often changes amongst immigrants. Those that originally intended to stay in Canada because of the situations in their home countries come to the conclusion that they are better off returning while some who intended to return end up staying in Canada.

Participants believe that the idea has merit and is worthy of further study. For examples, it is well known amongst the Portuguese that those from the Azores had a higher initial inclination to stay in Canada while the continental Portuguese often had more of an inclination to return to Portugal. Many Sri Lankans would like to return to their country if the wars there stopped while Somalians in Toronto are starting to buy houses and take a longer view of life in Canada based on recent conclusions as to the political stability of their home country.

C: Barriers and Enablers to better living conditions

416-□ -□ Family Support

Regardless of how a particular working-age recent immigrant fares in the labour market, he/she can avoid poverty because of family support.

Poverty is a family-based concept. There are working-age people in Canada who do not work at all but who do not live in a context of material deprivation because they can count on other family members to fulfill their needs.

As working-age recent immigrants are less likely to be single parents and unattached individuals (i.e. they are more likely to live with a spouse), they are more likely to have more than one potential earner in their family.

Accordingly, direct family support is likely to keep new immigrants from income poverty. If working-age immigrants are more likely to be part of a couple, they can count on their own resources but also on their spouse's resources to escape poverty.

However, it is also the case that they do not live in poor living conditions because of the help from their extended families. Members of the focus groups noted that short term support for a working age person is the reality – six months is considered a long stay with a family member (other than the spouse!).

After a short period of time, it is highly likely that the host family will be suggesting to the non-working guest that there are 'apartments available' and 'work available' in order to curtail the length of the stay. The non-working guest will be urged to take any job for which they are physically capable.

The exception will be older men and women (particularly) where they may not be pressured to take on outside work but would be expected to take part in household chores and babysitting.

2. Community Support

2.1. Community Self Protection – Communities that do well at protecting themselves often help their members move out of poverty. Of necessity, this phenomenon also works to exclude other communities from jobs and opportunity.

There was considerable discussion of the role of community self protection. In every instance, community self-protection was considered to be a 'double edged sword'. If a community protects itself well, then others outside are excluded while those within the community may be helped. In addition, communities often help certain members while excluding others.

Communities that are defined clearly by ethnicity, language, and nationality and which have been established in Canada for a long time tend to do very well while communities that are new, ethnically diverse and embrace several nationalities (e.g. Latin America, Africa) may not fare as well in respect of protecting community members.

In the St. Christopher catchment, focus group participants believed that the older established communities represent positive community self protection and these include (but are not limited to):

- Cantonese
- Italian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- South Asian, and
- Ukrainian

Newer un-established communities (in comparison) include:

- African,
- Certain Latin American communities
- Mandarin
- The former Yugoslavia

It is likely the case that those people who immigrate from the older established communities will experience the following advantages:

- Preferential access to certain work available to the community
- Better support respecting settlement
- Positive infrastructure
- Better information; and
- Political support for community issues

For those in the newer less established communities, new immigrants are likely to experience:

- Reduced access to work
- Inadequate support for settlement and resettlement
- Reduced infrastructure
- Inadequate information; and
- Little political support for community issues.

To the extent that increased immigration is experienced from communities that are able to offer self-protection, results in regard to poverty reduction and work will be positive. Where increased immigration is experienced from the less established communities, the results are more likely to be negative.

416-532-□ **Inter and Intra-cultural and ethnic racism and gender discrimination**

Communities that do well as a whole in Canada often do well for their members – however, even within communities, there is discrimination between members based on ethnicity, gender, age and other factors. Being on the side of those who are favoured can be an enabler while it serves as a barrier for others.

Although racism is often portrayed in the context of discrimination against minorities by a dominant or mainstream culture, discrimination between groups and within groups plays an important role in social exclusion and ultimately who is included and excluded in the job market in any particular community.

The concept and reality of community self protection is fundamentally different from discrimination by the dominant society against minorities and inter cultural and intra-cultural discrimination. The important observation here is that these forms of discrimination tend to exclude certain new immigrants from the job market. For example, in the construction trades in Toronto, there is the perception that Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and South American communities have had a monopoly on jobs in the construction industry. The perception has been that others are not as easily accepted into these jobs.

Immigration Class

The St. Christopher House focus groups noted that family class immigrants tend to be children and older people who do not intend to find work in Canada although it was noted that non-elderly parents (e.g. age 55-65) often turn to paid work to gain a degree of independence from their adult children. For both of these groups, ongoing family support is key in escaping poverty.

Members of the focus groups made important distinctions between independent immigrants and sponsored refugees. Although it is understood that sponsored refugees and independent immigrants are chosen for their ability to become self-sufficient in Canada, the availability of settlement programs such as the Refugee Adjustment Program (RAP) through CIC contributes to earlier adjustment among sponsored refugees as compared to independent immigrants. It is believed that independent immigrants could also benefit from adjustment assistance.

On the other hand, it was noted that independent immigrants are much more motivated than sponsored refugees to achieve their employment goals in Canada during the first two years after entrance to Canada. The reason for this is that refugees are still in 'survival mode' during this early period and live their lives on a 'day to day' basis. Long term plans are usually not formulated after a period of adjustment within Canada.

Making Sense of the St. Christopher House Consultation findings

There is good news and there is bad news regarding the living conditions of recent immigrants in poverty. The good news is that many recent immigrants

- Who are thought not to be working often are working hard but not in ways that are easily counted in an official capacity – under the table (in the cash economy) is significant
- Are likely making more money than is captured in official data meaning that they have better living conditions and can provide support to their families and communities
- Are benefiting from the supports available in many communities
- Overcome disincentives to work

The bad news is that many other recent immigrants:

- Are working very hard and not finding sufficient time to spend with their families. Work at multiple jobs is not sustainable in the longer term
- Do not understand or appreciate the benefits available through EI and CPP as well as other refundable tax credits because of a lack of information,;
- Believe that the benefits from mainstream programs like EI and CPP are so unavailable or available so far in the future to be trivial. This leads to long term 'under the table' work being perceived as a viable and economic option over a working lifetime;
- Are working in the cash economy and thus are not eligible to some government programs (such as E.I. and CPP) and are not gaining experience on the formal Canadian labour market.
- Make choices to wait for or study for a viable well paid job as opposed to pursuing more immediate employment; even though they came to Canada on the understanding that their skills were verified and that they were needed immediately.
- Become depressed and dependant of social transfers because of disillusion.

Recommendations

- 1. Provide special government supports for non-established communities where community members live in poverty.**
- 2. Conduct community education campaigns noting the problems and hazards of working in the cash economy including the importance of filing an accurate tax return. In specific, prepare special information on the importance of the CPP for new Immigrants who may be enticed into the underground economy.**
- 3. Enforce the existing overtime provisions under provincial Employment standards legislation**
- 4. Fund studies of intra-community and inter-community racism, gender discrimination and with the view to reducing barriers to employment, wage progression and career advancement.**
- 5. Improve (reduce) EI qualification periods for recent immigrants**
- 6. Commission and fund a longitudinal study of recent adult immigrants who cannot get any kind of work in their chosen field or any other field with a view to discover and**

document the reasons for employment failure and underemployment.

- 7. Create and fund plain language publications relating to employment that can be translated into multiple languages with correct information concerning matters related to employment and training.**

- 8. Create a fund to study depression and immobilization among new immigrants in order to recommend real and positive steps for new immigrants to overcome post-immigration depression.**

- 9. Implement the Working Income Tax Benefit promised in the Federal Budget (2006) and the 2005 Economic Statement (Minister of Finance) in order to improve the options for low income persons and retain more new immigrants in the above ground wage economy.**

Contact name(s) and phone number(s)

John Stapleton
Community Undertaking Social Policy Fellow
St Christopher House
(416) 298-0963 email: jsbb@rogers.com

Odete Nascimento
Unit Director
St. Christopher House
416-532-4828 email: odetena@stchrishouse.org

Appendix 1: Introduction to St. Christopher House

Since it first opened its doors as a settlement house in its original Kensington Market location at 67 Wales Avenue in 1912, St. Christopher House has played a vital role in each community it has served. It was founded by the Presbyterian Church in Canada under the leadership of Sir James Woods.

In the 1940's, St. Christopher House became a participant in the United Community Fund and continues to be a member of the United Way from which it receives a portion of its funding.

It is now a non sectarian social services agency, located in west central Toronto, with a catchment area* going from the lakeshore in the south to Bloor Street in the north and from Bathurst Street in the east to Roncesvalles Avenue in the west.

From its various locations in the past to its more recent ones on Queen St. West at Bathurst, on Ossington Avenue at Dundas West, at 1033 King St. West, and on West Lodge Avenue at Queen West in Parkdale, St. Christopher House has been part of the lives and hearts of people of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

Successive waves of immigrant families have made downtown Toronto their first stop in Canada and, in the process, have discovered that St. Christopher House is one of their first and best friends.

Our largest facility at 248 Ossington now houses the **Older Adult Centre** which offers a variety of programs for older adults, people with disabilities and their care givers; the **Woman Abuse Program**; the **Settlement and Adult Education Program**; the Programs for **Children, Youth and Family Support Programs**; the **Music School** and the **Volunteer Coordination** . Employment Programs are located at 1033 King St. West and include **Toronto Youth Job Corps** and **Employment Preparation Program**. The **Financial Advocacy and Problem-Solving Program** is also located at 1033 King St. West. The **Meeting Place**, a drop in for socially isolated adults, is located at 588 Queen Street West. On the top floor of this facility are located the House's central administration and the **Community Response and Advocacy Unit**.

Parkdale is base for two **Supportive Housing Program** one at 20 West Lodge Avenue and another at Springhurst 1447 King Street West. **Parkdale Focus Community Project** is located at 1497 Queen St. West, Suite 103.

St. Christopher House is committed to reflecting the changing face of our society. Ours is one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in Toronto. People of more than 60 cultures, speaking over 40 languages live within our catchment area. All ages and income levels are represented, with a high number of people living on a low or fixed income. The diversity of our community increases each year. In partnership with our neighbours, St. Christopher House strives to find solutions to problems and current issues and to develop relevant services.

PROGRAMS

Programs for Newcomers

While all our programs are open to newcomers these programs work specifically with immigrants and refugees.

[The Immigrant and Refugee Services Program](#) provides information and support to help newcomers individually and as community members, develop the skills and knowledge to help themselves and participate in society. The program also provides ESL classes.

[Community Parenting Outreach Program](#) (CPOP) provides outreach, accompaniment and translation to newcomer or isolated families with at least one child between the ages of 0-6 years living in the Parkdale and High Park communities and connect them to needed services.

St. Christopher House has a wide variety of **learning opportunities** for adults. While most St. Christopher House programs provide opportunities for learning, these programs see learning, in its broadest sense, as their core activity.

[The Adult Literacy Program](#) provides one-to-one and small group learning for English speaking adults who want to improve their reading, writing and math skills.

[Bang the Drum](#) provides Internet access and computer tutoring. It provides members of the community with an opportunity to develop their skills with new communication technologies in a collaborative and supportive setting. The program provides free computer tutoring in a variety of topics as well as access to the Internet.

[The GED & Academic Upgrading Program](#) helps people prepare for the GED, the High School equivalency exam.

[ESL](#) (English a Second Language) The Immigrant and Refugee Services have 2 types of ESL classes, the beginner and intermediate, offered by the Toronto District School Board. . There is also small group tutoring.

Employment Programs

St. Christopher House has 2 Employment Programs.

[The Employment Preparation Program](#) (EPP) provides one-to-one employment counseling and workshops to assist you in your job search and your career options.

[The Toronto Youth Job Corps](#) (TYJC) is an employment program designed to connect at-risk youth to the work place through employment, school and/or training. We work with at-risk youth, between the ages of 16-29 who are out of school and out of work, to develop important life and work skills that will ensure future employment success.

Drop-Ins

[The New Hope Drop-In](#) provides a welcoming place for men and women who are homeless or marginally housed in the Parkdale community. The goal of the New Hope Drop-In is to provide a safe and friendly environment where socially isolated members of the community can meet, socialize and access needed supports.

The main goal of the [Meeting Place](#) has always been to lower social isolation. We work to increase access to income through advocacy, public education and skills development. Using a community development approach, the Meeting Place staff and members work together to remove problems that keep people from housing and income. Staff and members also work to create a community space that offers safety, security and access to basic needs.

The [Youth Zone Drop-in](#) is a space for local youth ages 13 to 18. Youth participate in a range of safe, fun activities in a “drug-free” space.

The [Portuguese-Speaking Fathers Group](#) offers a drop-in for Portuguese-speaking fathers of children 0 to 6 and provides opportunities for fathers to strengthen their relationships with their children, develop relationships with other fathers and receive information on resources available in the community.

The [Drop-In at the Elderly Persons’ Centre](#) offers an opportunity for individuals 55 years of age or older to socialize with their peers in a safe and friendly environment and to receive information on health, wellness and services available.

Computers and Internet

[Bang the Drum](#) provides Internet access and computer tutoring. It provides members of the community with an opportunity to develop their skills with new communication technologies in a collaborative and supportive setting. The program provides free computer tutoring in a variety of topics as well as access to the Internet.

Music

[The Music School](#) offers individual classes in piano, guitar, accordion, clarinet, violin, voice and MIDI recording and composing using a computer. We also have an adult community choir and a children’s choir.

Violence against Women and Children

[The Violence Against Women and Children Program](#) provides a variety of services to help women who have suffered violence in their lives, including crisis intervention as well as individual and group supportive counselling in English, Portuguese and Spanish. The program also provides individual and group counselling for children and youth who have been exposed to violence in the home.

Alcohol and Drug Prevention

The [Parkdale FOCUS](#) Community builds on existing health promotion, prevention, and early intervention programs with the support of many community players in order to reduce alcohol and other drug misuse in this part of Toronto.

Money

The [Financial Advocacy and Problem-Solving Program](#) works to enhance people's ability to take control of their financial life. We help people in immediate financial difficulty by providing information and discussing choices available, and we try to enable them to make informed longer-term financial decisions.

Programs for Older Adults

The [Older Adult Centre \(OAC\)](#) offers a basket of services to seniors, persons with disabilities and their caregivers. It is our goal to give clients the choice of living independently in their own homes for as long as possible. Individuals have the opportunity to become involved in health and wellness programs, leadership development, coalitions and community development initiatives in addition to participate in more structured programs. Multilingual staff, as well as trained and supervised volunteers, provides services in a culturally sensitive manner.

The [Client and Family Services](#) supports clients to maintain as independent and as healthy a life in their own communities as they are able. Social workers provide in-home and in-office assessments to identify needs, facilitate access to information and community resources, develop short and long-term service plans, and provide monitoring and follow-up service to seniors and persons with disabilities. Staff also offers caregiver counselling and caregiver training sessions.

The [Adult Day Services \(Alzheimer Day Program and Frail Elderly Programs\)](#), offer social and recreational activities for people with physical and/or cognitive impairments, to keep individuals socially active and mentally and physically stimulated. The program also provides the opportunity respite for caregivers.

Volunteers and staff of the [Meals on Wheels Program](#) deliver meals 7 days a week to frail seniors and to persons with disabilities who cannot prepare their own meals.

[Home Support Programs and Supportive Housing](#), are provided in the clients home and includes a range of services from personal care, attendant care, respite, light housekeeping, shopping, meal preparation and escorting to medical appointments.

The [Transportation](#) program provides frail seniors door-to-door individualized rides to medical appointments, grocery shopping and social activities.

Through the [Friendly Visiting and Security Check](#), volunteers provide companionship and support to isolated seniors and persons with disabilities through one-on-one home visits or offer regular telephone calls to monitor their practical needs, safety and well being.

The [Elderly Persons Centre \(EPC\)](#) offers a wide variety of (recreational, social, wellness and leadership development activities designed to promote personal growth in a safe and welcoming environment that embraces the diversity of our community. The educational, social, cultural and recreation activities are delivered by the senior members of the EPC Volunteer Team and multilingual professional staff.

The [Health Action Theatre by Seniors \(HATS\)](#) is an innovative, community-based health care program for seniors, which uses a form of educational theatre to raise awareness about difficult issues facing seniors.

Programs for Children, Youth and Families

The [Children Youth and Family Support Programs](#) include:

The [After School Program](#) provides comprehensive social, recreational and educational activities throughout the school year for children between the ages of 6 and 12, from 3:30 to 6 p.m...

The [After School Tutoring Program](#) matches children ages 6 to 16 that are experiencing difficulties at school with a volunteer tutor who assists them with a variety of educational subjects, with the focus being primarily on reading and math.

[Day Camps \(Holiday and Summer\)](#) provide a wide range of activities focusing on fun, education, recreation, and skill development for children ages 6 to 12 during the Summer, as well as at the Winter Holiday and the March break.

[Growing Up Healthy Downtown \(GUHD\)](#) provides a variety of supports to parents/caregivers with children less than 6 years of age through activities such as a family learning program, the Parent Relief, the Music and Movement Program, the Indoor Playground; and the Pre-School Summer Day Camp school readiness for children ages 4 and 5.

The [Portuguese-Speaking Fathers Group](#) provides participants, Portuguese-speaking fathers with children ages 0 to 6, with the opportunity to strengthen their relationships with their children, to develop relationships with other fathers, and to receive resource information, and individual support when needed.

The [Youth Zone Drop-in](#) is a space for local youth ages 13 to 18. Youth participate in a range of safe, fun activities and learn about the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in a “drug-free” space.

Through the [Youth Leadership Skills Development Program](#) youth, aged 13 to 18, participate in life skills workshops and training and are placed in volunteer placements where they have the opportunity to develop and enhance their interpersonal skills, learn new skills and knowledge and gain valuable volunteer experience.

The [Graffiti Transformation Program](#) is a program for youth 13 to 16 to build on personal skills as they create images that beautify the city and strengthen communities. The project provides local businesses, parks and residents with an opportunity to replace the graffiti on their property with a colourful mural of their liking while endorsing anti-violence messages.

[Healthy Relationships Workshops](#) are conducted in local high schools on an ongoing basis and also act as a mechanism in reaching young women who could benefit from participating in the Leadership Program and other House programs.

- **Appendix 2:**

Some Top Tens from the Focus Group Discussions

(Copied from a white board)

Barriers

1. Negative Acculturation
2. Not understanding the system; getting lost;
3. Having a 'soft discipline': professions that do require language skills
4. Unfamiliar Language and Alphabet
5. Non-existent family and support networks
6. Ghettos (where poverty is transferred to the next generation)
7. Depression & Immobilization
8. Inter/intra ethnic racism/discrimination
9. Mainstream racism
10. Community self protection in unestablished communities

Success Variables (or perceived success factors) _

1. Hard disciplines: professions that do not require language that pay well
2. Astronaut Cultures
3. Positive Acculturation
4. Positive Community self protection: Older Established communities:
5. Being Single and able to move to opportunity
6. Positive Extended families
7. Perceived strong Family Obligations – sending money home
8. More Independent/Business immigrants
9. Immediate Long term Commitment to live in Canada
10. New Immigrant Optimism

Neither Success nor Failure:

1. Disincentives in social programs that make you ‘make the leap’
2. Free Trade and the changes in Jobs available
3. Differing Waves of Immigrants over the past 30 years
4. Education Extremes
5. Overall program erosion for Working Age Canadians – Immigrants only a litmus for other structural change
6. Urbanization
7. Distance from the Tax System
8. Working under the Threshold
9. The Two Year sort out period
10. Family Obligations at home

Appendix 3: Glossary

1. CBC – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – the main public radio and television in Canada
2. CIC – Citizenship and Immigration Canada – federal government department responsible for immigration.
3. CPP – Canada Pension Plan – a mandatory plan that funds itself through mandatory contributions from employers and employees and which provide retirement, disability, and survivor benefits.
4. EI – Employment Insurance – a mandatory plan that funds itself through mandatory contributions for employers and employees and which provides benefits largely to persons who are temporarily unemployed.
5. ESL – English as a Second Language – courses for persons who require language training in English
6. GIS – Guaranteed Income Supplement – an income tested payment of up to approximately \$550 a month to persons over 65 who are single and have less than \$15,000 in income or who are couples and realize less than \$30,000 per year.
7. HRSD - Human Resources and Social Development – a federal department responsible for policy and programs for most of Canada’s federal income security and service programs.
8. IMDB – Immigration Database – a CIC database that tracks the progress of immigrants
9. IRPA – The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act – the current legislation governing refugee determination, immigration and settlement in Canada
10. NCBS – The National Child Benefit Supplement – a federal program providing income tested income security benefits to lower income families in Canada with children.
11. PRI – The Policy Research Initiative – a federal cross cutting initiative designed to provide a conduit for policy advice to the federal government while engaging outside groups in wide ranging federal government policy that crosses departmental jurisdictions.
12. Statistics Canada (Statscan) – the federal government agency responsible for data collection, interpretation and dissemination and statistics of concern and interest to Canadians. Statistics Canada runs Canada’s census activities.