

**THIS ISSUE**  
Immigrant  
Labour Market  
Research  
Project

The Project In  
a Nutshell

An  
Immigrant's  
Perspective

Steering  
Committee  
Member  
Organizations

LIP Updates

**NEXT ISSUE**  
Refugee  
Research  
Project

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SURREY LIP NEWSLETTER

# Engaged & Inclusive



## GETTING TO WORK

The LIP's recently completed Labour Market Research Project concentrates on what is for many newcomers their biggest frustration with life in Canada.

The first half of 2015 saw the Surrey LIP unveil two major research projects, and each revealed labour market issues as a major concern. In a survey conducted during the compilation of the Immigrant Integration Research Project, 41% of immigrants agreed with the statement "I have difficulty finding employment that matches my education, skills and abilities in Surrey." Meanwhile, >



(Getting to Work: continued)

> in the survey portion of the Service Mapping Project, 47% of respondents felt that employment services for newcomers were inadequate. An additional research project, on refugee settlement priorities, has yet to be completed but will also highlight labour market issues.

All of this confirms that difficulties finding suitable employment are a major concern for Surrey's immigrants and refugees, and for many the greatest barrier to integration. So, why is this the case, and what can be done? Those questions were central to the Surrey LIP's third major research project, the Immigrant Labour Market Research Project, which was

released in November.

As both co-chair of the Surrey LIP and CEO of the Surrey Board of Trade, Anita Huberman is doubly interested in seeing newcomers find better access to the labour pool. "It's not just from the immigrant perspective," she says. "It's also what business needs."

Huberman points out that on average Surrey's population grows by more than 1,000 people every month, and over half of the new arrivals were born outside of Canada. "Many employers complain of skills shortages, but meanwhile immigrants have a real challenge even speaking to employers and HR people," she says. "We have a lot of work to do."

The labour market project was led by Kerry Jothen of Human Capital Strategies, which employed a multi-pronged approach to gathering data and assessing

barriers and challenges. The first step, after a literature review, was an employer survey with 114 respondents. That was followed by separate focus groups involving employers, immigrants and immigrant service organizations. "It was a strong mix of research and quite comprehensive," says Jothen. "Altogether, 175 people were involved."

The report identified numerous challenges (see "What did the report find?" below), but Jothen believes it also turned up many positives, including the fact that more than a third of business respondents were immigrants themselves. "That's indicative of the population, but it's also an opportunity," he says. It's an advantage that a large and growing proportion of Surrey business owners and HR employees are immigrants, since they should be more attuned to the availability and

## The Immigrant Labour Market Research Project In A Nutshell



**What were the goals?** These were the project's primary aims.

- 1** Obtain an understanding of Surrey's current and looming labour market needs.
- 2** Understand the barriers and challenges faced by employers in their attempts to recruit, hire and retain new immigrant and refugee workers.
- 3** Understand these employers' successful practices.
- 4** Understand the successful practices, supports, and key steps taken by new immigrants and refugees who have successfully entered the labour market.
- 5** Identify the gaps in service between job-seeking immigrants and refugees and employee-recruiting employers.
- 6** Identify improved means and methods of connecting employers with local immigrant talent.



**What did the report find?** These are the most important labour market issues identified by the project.

- English Language Training**  
Especially the lack of language programs within, or geared to, workplaces.
- Employer Capacities and Knowledge**  
There are few internal programs and low awareness of outside services available to help recruit, train and incorporate newcomers.
- Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Opportunities**  
These are an employment fallback for some, a preference for others, but few services are available to help.
- Canadian Workplace Culture**  
Employers find it challenging to orient employees to practices and expectations.
- Funding Challenges**  
Is Surrey getting its fair share of funding, given its large and rapidly growing newcomer population?
- Training/Internship Opportunities**  
Getting Canadian experience is vital.
- Lack of Central Coordination**  
Gaps and overlaps in service provision; no one-stop shop.

readiness of newcomer jobseekers.

Still, he sees lots of room for improvement, including several things that could be accomplished quite quickly and cheaply. "There could be more coordination among service providers," he says. "And better communication between businesses and service providers."

There is an opportunity to provide better support for newcomers who are entrepreneurs or self-employed. And notice should be taken of the high proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises among Surrey's employers. "These are often the businesses that are growing, but they have no HR department and limited recognition of how to recruit and support immigrants," he says.

Finally, he notes the importance of English-language training, especially

the opportunity for training to take place at the workplace and to focus on technical and industry-specific English.

These action items and others (see "So now what?" below) will be taken into account as the Surrey LIP begins to develop its Immigration and Refugee Strategy early in 2016. Similarly, says Anita Huberman, the Board of Trade will be developing its own action. "And we stress the need for action," she emphasizes.

As part of a pilot project soon to be unveiled, participating businesses will have their needs identified, then will be matched with both immigrants and trainers who can help facilitate the new employees' rapid orientation. "We need to show results," says Huberman.

## AN IMMIGRANT'S PERSPECTIVE

Almost three years after arriving here, Drastant Mehta finally has a job appropriate to his skills.



A native of India, Drastant Mehta arrived in 2013 from Kenya, where he headed an IT team of 68 people. Drastant, today a member of Surrey Local Immigration Partnership's Immigrant Roundtable, originally thought he'd have little trouble finding a job in Canada. After all, he is a native English speaker and had top-notch qualifications in an area where his skills were much in demand.

But that's not how things worked out. Drastant's problem, he says, was that Canadian hiring processes are very different from those he was familiar with, and he was doing a lot of things wrong. After three months of frustration he became aware of some of the no-cost services available to immigrants, and with the assistance of service provider Back In Motion, he was able to fix up his resume and adjust his approach to more closely approximate Canadian ways.

*(An Immigrants Perspective cont. on page 4)*



**So, now what?** These are the recommendations stemming from the Labour Market Research Project, assuming no or limited funding increase.

- > Strengthen coordination of immigrant employment and employer-related programs and services.
- > Encourage employers and industry groups to adopt occupation and sector-specific English language training (on-site) strategies.
- > Create a Surrey Labour Shortage Task Force.
- > Use the Surrey LIP to create an employer/immigrant portal focussed on jobs and employment.
- > Strengthen business sector involvement in the Surrey LIP.
- > Engage local professional immigrant networks.
- > Host an annual Surrey immigrant employment summit.
- > Increase employer and industry awareness of immigrant service organizations and the capacity for employing Surrey immigrants.
- > Create an Employer Advisory Roundtable within the Surrey LIP.
- > Leverage increased funding for Surrey immigrant employment strategies.



Almost immediately he found a job with Telus, albeit a much more junior position than he was qualified for. Only today, after three promotions, has he risen to a post similar to the one he enjoyed in Kenya. This pattern of joblessness and underemployment is very familiar to immigrants, says Drastant, and it isn't just financially harmful, but hurts morale and colours impressions of the new country.

Every immigrant's experience is different, but Drastant has several observations, many of which square with the LIP's Labour Market Research Project.

First, Drastant says, service providers here do a great job, but not such a great job of making their presence known. "There is a lot of help, but people don't know about it," he says.

Second, foreign qualifications and references aren't highly regarded by Canadian employers. Ideally, this situation will improve, but immigrant job-seekers need

to be aware that their professional connections and experiences carry little weight, and that Canadian experience is crucial. He also believes that service providers need to tailor their efforts and advice to current labour market conditions, and hopes that accurate

measurements can be taken of the number of immigrants assisted.

Third, Drastant's first job, a contractor position, ended up costing him more money due to lack of clarity around setting up a personal services company and

invoicing for services provided. The large number of immigrants who are entrepreneurial or self-employed need more help, he thinks, with legal and tax systems that are often unfamiliar.

Although happily employed today, Drastant retains a concern for the way immigrants access the labour market and looks forward to changes that will help other newcomers avoid some of the pitfalls that befell him.

*Every immigrant's experience is different, but Drastant has several observations, many of which square with the LIP's Labour Market Research Project.*

## LIP UPDATES

### Surrey LIP Stakeholder Consultations

During the fall of 2015, over 110 local stakeholders have participated in three Surrey LIP Stakeholder Consultations and provided their input on the priorities for the Surrey Immigrant Settlement Strategic Plan.

### Syrian Refugee Forum

The City, in partnership with the Surrey LIP team, is organizing a public forum on Syrian Refugees. The

forum will take place on January 20, and is intended to respond to the public's interest in the arrival of Syrian refugees, as well as to harness their good will by providing opportunities for residents to connect to local settlement agencies. For details, please check [www.SurreyLIP.ca](http://www.SurreyLIP.ca).

### "Welcome to Surrey" Brochure

A "Welcome to Surrey" brochure is being developed and will be available in English and Arabic. The brochure will provide infor-

mation about City services and Surrey-based settlement service agencies providing services in Arabic.

### Read Surrey LIP Blog

Refugees and other research assistants working with the Our Community Our Voices project describe their experiences on our website. Led by SFU-Surrey, the project aims to identify refugee settlement priorities specific to Surrey.

## Steering Committee Member Organizations

These are the organizations that provide leadership direction to the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership.

- 1 City of Surrey
- 2 The Surrey Board of Trade
- 3 Alexandra Neighbourhood House
- 4 Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC)
- 5 City of Surrey, Human Resources
- 6 City of Surrey Social Planning (Contract Manager)
- 7 City of Surrey, Parks, Recreation & Culture
- 8 Surrey Libraries
- 9 DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society
- 10 Training Group at Douglas College
- 11 Human Resources Management Association (HRMA)
- 12 Fraser Health Authority: Population and Public Health
- 13 Fraser Health Authority: Primary Health Care
- 14 Immigrant Employment Council of BC
- 15 Immigrant Services Society of BC
- 16 Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- 17 Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub Society
- 18 Options Community Services Society
- 19 Pacific Community Resources Society
- 20 Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS)
- 21 Semiahmoo House Society
- 22 SFU Surrey
- 23 S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Surrey Delta Service Centre
- 24 Surrey School District #36
- 25 Surrey RCMP
- 26 Sources Community Resources Society
- 27 Surrey Interfaith Council
- 28 Umoja Operation Compassion Society
- 29 Vancity Credit Union
- 30 YMCA

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Let us answer with a word that sums up a lot of what we're about: **Welcome!**

There are many ways to get involved with the Surrey Local Immigration Project, whether as an organization or as an individual. Surrey LIP will host city-wide community consultations and everyone is welcome to join. You can also request to be on our Surrey LIP stakeholder list and receive updates on a regular basis.

Please contact **Olga Shcherbyna**, Surrey LIP Coordinator, for more information.  
Email: [oshcherbyna@surrey.ca](mailto:oshcherbyna@surrey.ca)  
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