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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)):
Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting 41, Thursday, December 10, 2009, pursuant to the orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study of best practices in settlement services.

We have four organizations with us today to provide us with assistance for preparing our report on best practices, and I want to thank you all for coming. I've spoken to you briefly as to how we try to run this meeting. Each of you will have up to 10 minutes. You don't have to take the full 10 minutes, but you have up to 10 minutes.

The first presenter will be Joe Chang, who is the general manager of the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada.

Good morning, Mr. Chang.

Mr. Joe Chang (General Manager, Chinese Professionals Association of Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to everyone.

Thank you for your invitation to the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada to prepare for important discussions like this one.

Over the past 17 years we have been known as CPAC, an organization that represents over 25,000 foreign-born professionals who live, work, and own businesses across Canada.

Recently we welcomed both Mr. Calandra and Mr. Karygiannis to our annual education foundation scholarship gala, and just before the gala, we held our first Chinese professionals day here in Ottawa. Thank you again to those who attended those events.

How to help newcomers settle in Canada is a question that governments have been working to address for hundreds of years. Throughout our history, Canada has encouraged skilled immigrants to settle here, continue our growth, and continue building this great nation we call home. In my time today, I will make three observations and three suggestions that can make a real difference in the way people settle in Canada.

First are some observations.

First, helping professionals is critical in lifting the prosperity of entire communities in Canada. Some might not think that the most well-educated immigrants need settlement services, but they do.

Second, Canada lacks sufficient bridging programs necessary to help foreign-trained professionals practice in Canada.

Our third observation is that the Government of Canada should do more to partner with non-governmental or service-provider organizations like CPAC, the YMCA, CICS, and others to deliver bridging programs for professionals. Direct connection to the community and a lack of understanding of government by newcomers often prevents immigrants from taking advantage of all that government has to offer within its own agencies. Plus, accountable outside organizations can be more responsive to alter training to suit the situation as it changes on the street.

What's the cost of not helping professionals settle in Canada? The cost is that Canada becomes a less attractive place to land, particularly in relation to the United States and Australia, which are attracting more and more professionals from Asia. So we need to help professionals, build bridging programs, and enable NGOs to deliver programs.

Now let me provide some context and offer three suggestions.

CPAC is a very busy place these days. Our career development, mentoring support, entrepreneurship training, and networking forums are full, and we're planning to build a new career and education centre in Toronto to manage the demand for our services as things get busier.

A few days ago, our Prime Minister declared that the greatest opportunity for economic growth for Canada is in Asia. We support this statement, and the Prime Minister's recent trip to China, India, and South Korea will serve to increase the demand for settlement services in the coming months.

At the present time, the only government partner CPAC has bridging program agreements with is the Government of Ontario. Together, in concert with partners, we work with the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to help professionals close the gap between practising their profession and having a low-paying job in Canada.

Given the current demands for our services and the stories we hear from Asia, we see a great need for professional settlement bridging support in the following areas: mentoring support, soft skills training, and regulation and certification. Allow me to quickly illustrate the benefits of these three programs.

With regard to mentoring support, we have developed a very successful mentoring support program that has helped many newcomers find employment in Canada. We believe that matching newcomers with a mentor from their own culture truly helps them become settled more quickly. Mentors and mentees with similar cultural backgrounds are a success because they relate to each other—they build bonds of trust that are stronger than would otherwise be the case. This program is funded only by CPAC and other community-minded corporate partners who see these people as future employees.

Our second suggestion is a focus on soft skills training. Through our experience, we have learned that interpersonal and communication skills often make the difference for those competing for employment in Canada. We have seen first-hand that when professionals lack soft skills, entire families will suffer. CPAC encourages the Government of Canada to make soft skills training part of the curriculum in ESL and LINC programs.

Furthermore, the training must be industry-specific to be useful. For example, imagine starting a new business in Canada with 15 years of experience as an accountant in Beijing. You don't need certification to set up shop as an accountant in Canada, but for some clients, certain designations are required. To complicate the matter more, a new accountant has to choose from among four certification organizations that all say they are good. Plus, if you are from mainland China, chances are you've never met a lawyer, nor have you had to work with a bank in the way that we do here. As a result, to become established as a foreign-trained accountant in Canada takes years longer, if it happens at all.

We highly recommend more soft skills training broken down by professional categories, such as engineers, and divided further by subcategories, such as mechanical, electrical, civil.

Finally, let me turn to regulated professions: engineers, accountants, architects, health care professionals, and more. In Canada, highly skilled professionals are regulating themselves now more than ever. However, parallel regulations don't always exist in other countries. The difference becomes a barrier to settlement and success.

For example, I know a newcomer with a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering who came to Canada from China in 2002. He practised his profession for more than 15 years and was a leader in his industry back home. In China, engineers undergo rigorous training, but do not need certification. Upon graduation from university, they are qualified as engineers. After struggling for two years, working at a low-paying job in Canada, he found CPAC and enrolled in our mentoring and bridging program. He soon became employed in his own field and was qualified by the Professional Engineers of Ontario. Now in his early forties, he is doing consultative work in the U.S. on behalf of a Canadian engineering firm.

The same story is repeated in almost every profession. While we applaud the Government of Canada's recent framework for recognizing foreign credentials, there are very few profession-specific programs in place to help professionals bridge the gap between the profession they knew and the profession they want to practise here.

To summarize, professionals who immigrate to Canada need help to become successful citizens here. The Government of Canada has an important role to play in providing non-governmental organizations with the resources to deliver the bridging programs that professionals need to succeed.

Improved mentoring support, soft skills training, and certification support can help make Canada once again a destination of choice for professionals the world over. By helping professionals, you will help entire families and create community role models we can all be proud of.

● (0910)

CPAC is willing and ready to share our experience and our mentoring and bridging model with any community agency.

Thank you once again for honouring us with the opportunity today. I will be happy to answer any question you may have.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Chang. Those questions will follow.

We will now have Neethan Shan.

Members of the committee, there is an error in the orders of the day. The final item should read "Council of Agencies Serving South Asians".

I apologize for that, Mr. Shan, and you have up to ten minutes.

Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Neethan Shan (Executive Director, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians): Thank you. Thank you for having us here.

On behalf of the board of directors, staff, volunteers, and the participants of CASSA, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present to the standing committee. Since it's 10 minutes, I had a choice either to go deep with few or go broader with many. I've chosen to go broader with many, and if you have questions, I will definitely be willing to answer.

CASSA is an umbrella organization. Our mission is to facilitate the social, economic, cultural, and political empowerment of South Asians. We serve as a resource for information, research, mobilization, coordination, and leadership. Our overall goal is to increase the participation of South Asians in defining Canada's social, economic, political, and cultural future, not just necessarily to fit into what already exists but also to be part of defining what is to come.

We're not a front-line organization. We don't see clients on a one-to-one basis, so the views that we are going to bring as an umbrella organization of over 100 agencies would be a more systemic view of what exists. There definitely is a lot of good work being done through CIC and other immigration-related funding in terms of job search, in terms of language training, settlement counselling, settlement workers in schools, etc., and we would like to acknowledge the great job that's being done by our member agencies. We would like to say that those need to continue and need to be supported.

The other factor I would like to mention is that ethno-specific services and ethno-specific agencies play a very critical role in settlement. Though they're seen as serving one particular community, those agencies are well aware of the cultural and linguistic needs of the community. I would also urge the continued support of those ethno-specific agencies. Agencies such as South Asian Family Support Services, the South Asian Women's Centre, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services, Punjabi Community Health Services, TESOC community services for the Tamil community, and so on, are some examples of members who are doing amazing work in Ontario and are continuing to support settlement in a meaningful manner.

I just want to caution that the term "South Asian" is sometimes misleading because it's seen as a homogenous group from outside, but it's pretty diverse, and it is a large chunk of the population of Canada, so I think we need to also look at the diversity within South Asian communities. For example, a Muslim from Pakistan and a Muslim from Sri Lanka would have totally different lived experiences and different languages and so on. Except the faith, everything else seems different. It's the same thing for a Tamil coming from India and a Tamil coming from Sri Lanka, in terms of lived experiences and so on.

We should also acknowledge that there are communities such as the Punjabi community, which has been in Canada right from the mid-1800s. Sometimes it's insulting to keep considering them as immigrants or as newcomers, but at the same time we need to acknowledge that Punjabi community members are coming as we speak as well.

Keeping that diversity in mind is important for us as an agency that works on an identity of solidarity of South Asians rather than an identity of homogeneity. Recent initiatives such as the local immigration partnership model are very appreciated. It brings multiple stakeholders together. It is an innovative approach, and we would like to commend the CIC and the provincial government for partnering to do that. The only thing I would mention about it is that it should be built around immigrant engagement, and we still feel that those local immigration partnerships are service-provider-led or municipality-led. The immigrant population is still either consulted at a distance or is tokenized at times, so it's important to keep that in mind.

The move towards one-stop models, where there is a particular location such as the welcome centres and so on, is a good way to help newcomers at the start to navigate the whole system at one place, but moving towards one-stop and not having a dispersed geographical location of services in the long run would produce problems, because the proximity of services becomes an important

thing to have. A balance is needed between a one-stop model of services with having services mobile and dispersed across geographical regions that have very strong transportation challenges.

For the rest of my conversation I would like to focus on talking about smaller municipalities, forgetting about Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, which are urbanized cities. I'm talking about smaller communities, smaller cities that are facing a large number of immigrants. We're proposing something called smart settlement. What this is, is that we need to think beyond language instruction and job search. Those are two pillars of settlement. But let's talk about how much access do immigrants have to the public space. Let's talk about how much access do immigrants have in terms of arts, sports, and recreation, access to health, access to public decision-making, and a sense of belonging to the country. I think these factors are important if somebody is to feel settled.

• (0915)

For example, in the early parts of this decade, we talked about dispersion policies in immigration to make sure that the immigrant population was spread out. What we are suggesting is that when a father gets a job and goes to a particular municipality with the family, if the wife is not appreciated for her skills in that area and their children are not included in the school system in a meaningful way, they are not likely to stay. So retention of immigrants in smaller municipalities depends on the kind of access I was talking about.

What we are stressing is to have a smart settlement model that works on principles of access and equity. It would actually acknowledge that certain systems put up barriers for immigrants and that these barriers are based on power and privileges. That needs to be addressed if immigrants are to feel included. That has to come from proactive leadership from local leaders, local MPs, councillors, MPPs, educational institutions, and other institutions.

We try to do this at CASSA with the support of CIC. We are very thankful to the multicultural branch for this project. We are actually working in York Region to address these issues and are putting together a body based on the immigrant population as leaders and residents. The service sector is also working together to address inequities in access in York Region, which between 2001 and 2006 had a 22% increase in population. Within just one census, 40% of the public school board's students were visible minorities. I think it's important for us to look into those kinds of things.

We did a community-based engagement model and actually got the immigrant population involved. We are working in Peterborough and Waterloo this year with the same model to create more welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers and immigrants. We are thankful for this opportunity.

In conclusion, I would say to continue investing in existing programs that are effective, as I mentioned earlier. Ask the organizations you fund to build a component of civic engagement and community building into their programs. Make immigrant engagement a theme in the programs, because without engagement, meaningful settlement will not take place.

Continue to support ethno-specific agencies.

Revisit eligibility criteria for clients. It's difficult for some people to be fully integrated into society within three years. Some of the criteria, such as the number of years, becoming a citizen, and so on, need to be revisited.

Fund broader projects beyond language and job searching. Encourage projects that bring intercultural collaboration to addressing issues. That has to be organic and come from the bottom up rather than forced from the top down.

The last piece I would say is to support systemic change through policy, programs, and funding, whether it be changing the way school boards operate, public health operates, or municipalities operate. An immigrant partner initiative that looks at systemic change would be much appreciated.

Thank you very much for having me here. As I said, I'm involved with so many things, I would be glad to answer questions later. Thank you.

● (0920)

The Chair: You gave us a lot to talk about, Mr. Shan. Thank you for your concise presentation.

The third presenter is the executive director of the Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration Community Support Organization, Ms. Adeena Niazi.

Welcome, Ms. Niazi. You have up to 10 minutes.

Ms. Adeena Niazi (Executive Director, Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration Community Support Organization): Good morning, everybody, and thank you for inviting me.

I'm going to do a brief introduction of our organization and programs, what works well and what the challenges are, and also cover some recommendations.

The Afghan Women's Organization is committed to promoting the successful settlement of newcomers and refugees in Canada by providing a wide variety of programs and services with a unique service delivery approach. We also provide assistance and protection to refugees through sponsorship to Canada. Annually, we serve over 5,000 clients of all ages and genders, with special focus on women and their families. The majority of our clients are from the Afghan community, but we are pleased to see we are getting an increasing number of clients from several other newcomer communities as well. The vast majority of our clients are refugees who have experienced trauma from war and violence. Most of the refugees who arrive in Canada have left loved ones behind. Moreover, women refugees generally have special needs distinct from those of men. Therefore, we provide professional innovative services to this vulnerable population, with the respect they deserve and the cultural and linguistic sensitivity they require.

Our services are managed by staff, most of whom can relate to the refugee experience and current circumstances of the clients. We also have a large number of committed volunteers, and we also have equally committed partners—the partners are from the settlement and other sectors as well. Over the past 19 years, our settlement staff and volunteers have identified clients' needs while serving and assisting newcomers upon their arrival in Canada. We acknowledge that settlement is a long process. Our clients want to realize their full

potential in contributing and becoming full participants in the Canadian social, economic, and political society. For this to happen, Canada has a positive responsibility to be flexible to allow its new members the full opportunity to contribute to its resources.

The question is how effectively the services could be provided and how we could integrate them. In terms of assisting newcomers to adapt, it is important to prioritize the services. To get a better sense of how to prioritize the services, it is important to reflect on the settlement process of newcomers. It is generally accepted that immigrants go through three main stages of settlement in Canada: an immediate stage, an intermediate stage, and a long-term stage. In the immediate stage, newcomers require a range of services, such as completing essential forms, food, shelter, and information. In the intermediate stage, immigrants learn more about how to access and enrol in a number of Canadian associations and situations. The long-term stage involves diverse and much more differentiated elements that facilitate the long-term participation of individuals in Canadian society.

The Afghan Women's Organization, as an ethnic-based organization, has been involved throughout the three stages of the settlement process of many of its clients and has played a role in connecting new immigrants to mainstream Canadians. At this time, I'll be talking about some of the programs that work very well for our organization and for our clients.

Language instruction for newcomers to Canada, or LINC. The LINC program is unique in that it offers women-only classes. This allows many women to attend class and acquire necessary language skills that they may not have been able to get otherwise. Our women-only classes create a high level of comfort and an environment that is warm and friendly for refugee women. Research has found that offering women-only classes is the most effective way to help women learn a language. On-site child-minding facilities and transportation assistance allow many women to benefit from the program.

Our youth program is also a unique program because it focuses on youth at risk. We also provide aggression replacement training for youth, and we provide counselling referrals and other programs, which have been very effective.

● (0925)

The seniors' program is a new program that is very helpful for seniors with multiple problems. Family programs assist families who are experiencing integration conflict. The ISAP services are also provided in a traditional way.

On the challenges we are facing here with Afghan women's organizations, women's needs are distinct from those of other members of the community. There is a need for supportive early settlement integration of immigrant women with special strategies and programs.

Many women are in caregiving roles and also supporting their family members. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the immigrant woman's role in the family by recognizing the family unit in the funding and programs for settlement and integration.

Immigrant and refugee women are not a homogenous group with the same needs. It's important to recognize the diversity within immigrant women, such as culture, language, family patterns, historical experiences in trauma due to war, and age differences. Therefore the best practices in settlement and integration programs should encompass the diversity and provide a range of services to meet the identified needs of the women.

The best practices in settlement and integration should also provide a holistic approach to meeting immigrant women's needs, rather than the silo approach of meeting only selected needs.

I have some recommendations. First, most of our clients who require settlement services have their citizenship and are not entitled to the services. Settlement services are restricted to landed immigrants. They are important for the women, because when they come here they put their own needs on hold and take care of their families. By the time they are ready to receive the settlement services, they are already citizens and aren't entitled to them. So I recommend that criteria for settlement services be expanded to include citizens.

Second, most of the newcomers, especially women, have to wait three months for OHIP. That also creates problems for them, especially when they are pregnant and cannot see a doctor.

Third, newcomers also face a big gap when it comes to mental health services. Many agencies only provide services to clients who are diagnosed with severe mental health illnesses. Often some of the mental health issues for newcomers are not considered severe, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and migration stress. Settlement services are not funded to deal with such issues. I recommend that mental health should be taken into consideration in future funding for the settlement organization.

• (0930)

The Chair: You have one minute, Ms. Niazi.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: I'm done, thank you.

The Chair: I didn't say that to cut you off.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: I'll be happy to answer questions.

The Chair: Okay, and there will be questions, I'm sure.

The final presenter is Mr. Patrick Au, the executive director of Chinese Family Services of Ontario.

Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Patrick Au (Executive Director, Chinese Family Services of Ontario): Good morning, Mr. Chair and all committee members.

Thanks for the opportunity to come here to talk about the best practices of Chinese Family Services and our settlement services.

I would like to start with an introduction of Chinese Family Services of Ontario and the existing environment in Toronto and how our agencies deal with the existing environment in Toronto,

with a focus on the Chinese community and the challenges we have. And then we have some recommendations as well.

Since 1988 there has been a group of community members who are very dedicated to their community. They found that quite a lot of newcomers and immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s came from Hong Kong, and they found that people needed counselling services, but there were no counselling services to help these newcomer immigrants. So at that time they started the Chinese Family Services as a project, and it started with only one person. Some of the volunteers and board members had to donate their money to support the agency because there was no funding for this agency.

Now, after 20 years, with lots of advocacy and community involvement, Chinese Family Services is an accredited family services agency to serve the Chinese community in Toronto. This is the only Chinese family services agency in Toronto to serve the Chinese community. Ten percent of the community speaks English, but 90% of them speak different languages, such as Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, Fujianese, and also Taiwanese. We have staff who can speak all these languages. They are all registered social workers.

This is the current situation that the Chinese Family Services of Ontario is handling. They are culturally sensitive to helping the 60% of clients we are serving who are newcomers, who have been here for just one or two years or a few years.

As you know, most immigrants move to either of two places, Toronto or Vancouver. In Toronto there are an estimated 500,000 Chinese who are newcomers. Even though it is said that the Chinese are very well off, in our agency we deal with Chinese who are marginalized, they are vulnerable, they lose their employment, they have poor families. They don't even have the money to use a phone to call for services. This is the situation we have.

Also, because most of the newcomers don't have their qualifications recognized, they get low-paying jobs. Even some of the professionals get low-paying jobs. Some of the immigrants are good and they create their own careers and they get better-paying jobs, but that is only a small population. For most of the Chinese newcomers we are serving, I'm talking about our experience, and they are very marginalized. Some of them have broken families or they are single parents. We also see child parenting issues, wife assault, violence; all these things are happening. We deal with all these things.

Because of these situations, we find that some individuals have emotional problems, whether they are employed or unemployed. But for newcomers the problems are even worse. Some of the newcomers, when they do find employment, if they have had family problems in their home country, because of adjustment issues when they come here their marital issues may get worse, or wife assault issues may get worse.

Also in our agency we are dealing with quite a lot of newcomers who are going through the second stages of immigrant processing. The research has found that the first stage of the immigration process is the honeymoon period. During the first months or first six months or even the first day they have a honeymoon period where there is curiosity and everything is fresh. But in the second stage they have difficult times. In the first stage there is an acceptance of being a Canadian.

● (0935)

In most of the cases we are dealing with, the immigrants are in the second stages. That means they are in difficult times. They have difficulty finding employment, housing, recognition—all these things. The psychological impact when you are in difficult times and are an immigrant means that some of them may blame Canada and glorify their home country. These are some of the things that come out. This is true, and it comes from research findings.

We are helping people to integrate into the community, to have a positive image of their communities, because of the crisis they are facing in the second stage of difficult times.

When they go through stage three, then it's "I am a Canadian. I have to vote. I have to do all these things...." These are all the things they have to deal with. This is a difficult time we have to work through with the newcomers.

In terms of best practices, we are the only counselling family service agency in Toronto. You can imagine...and you hear from the media and the public, occasionally there are some people who kill their wives or children and then themselves. Some professionals may jump from the 12th floor because they didn't get support or they got support from someone who says, in one example, "Don't worry. We'll take care of your daughter and wife." Afterward, the man jumped, because he heard someone telling him not to worry, they'd take care of his wife and daughter, and he thinks "I can die." This is a true story.

We find they need counselling services before the crisis comes into reality. Individual emotional counselling is not just one session and then everything is gone. It's not the way it works. That's why we have to deal with most of the family tragedies that happen in Toronto. Ninety per cent of the cases referred by the police for follow-up are homicide cases, wife-assault cases, and parenting issues or child abuse. It's when these things happen that they go through our agency. We have to deal with all these issues with very limited manpower. We have registered social workers. They are licensed and qualified, but we have to deal with quite a large caseload, which is difficult.

We have to provide evening services for people, because some of the people in low-paying jobs don't get paid when they come to our office during the daytime. We provide evening services for the poor people. They can come and receive counselling, and they don't have to take a day off, because if they take a day off they don't get paid.

We also provide them with a toll-free number. Whenever they have problems, they can call us, even from public telephones. Sometimes they just have mobile phones. They cannot even afford a home phone. They can call from anywhere, but with mobile phones you sometimes have to pay according to the hours used. We give

them a toll-free number so they can call us whenever they have a crisis.

Also, we have to provide them with a friendly environment. When they come to our agency they feel like it's not just an office or an interview room. They feel that it's like a home. We provide them with a very supportive environment. Our facial expression and body language shows that we are the ones who can help them and who understand the newcomers' stress.

We also provide services for the lesbian and gay community. We have a friendly environment for them when they have a crisis. They can come and deal with their situations.

These are all the things we have done.

Even when people have their Canadian citizenship and are employed, they still have emotional problems. Newcomers, whether they are employed or unemployed, can have emotional problems. My first recommendation is that the government should pay more attention and be more focused on counselling services for newcomers.

Second, imagine if a family tragedy happens, or they have to get advice from hospital care, or from the judicial system, or if they have to go through the Don Jail, or they're dealing with child abuse, or need to get legal services; this is very expensive.

● (0940)

So if the government could think about it and pay more attention to counselling and other settlement services for newcomers, that would be good. If they reduce the number of family tragedies, that will reduce the need for more intrusive and expensive hospital care, legal services, the judicial system, lawyers, and all those things. You can save quite a lot of money if you just spend some time and give priority and pay attention to the counselling services for newcomers. For the time being, counselling services are not the priority.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir, for your presentation.

The first question goes to Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the panellists for enlightening us with their points of view on this very important issue of best practices. I want to address a couple of concerns I have and perhaps hear your suggestions in relation to how we can improve the present circumstances we face.

What I find very interesting is that I hear often from immigrant groups and organizations that deal with immigrants and refugees that in fact there's a lack of funding to bring about the types of services and to promote services within the communities that would address some of the key concerns that immigrants have.

On the other hand, I see that, for example, funding for language training and settlement aid actually lapses in the neighbourhood of \$90 million. I can understand some of the reasons why, and I'm not one who is going to cast doubts about the present government at all. I think that accountability of how money is spent and the manner in which it is disposed of—because we have to respect the Canadian taxpayers' dollar—are extremely important. So transparency and accountability are important. However, I find it very odd that on one hand we have organizations that want more money and on the other hand this lapsing is occurring. Something is amiss here. There's a problem of flow, and therefore even in the administration of your organization, best practices become extremely important. Perhaps some of your organizations missed out on language training funding and settlement funding because either you missed the deadline or you weren't aware of a deadline, or the government transparency and accountability review took longer that it should have.

The point I'm making is this. We can't have this type of disconnect, a disconnect that allows funding to lapse on one hand while on the other hand you're all struggling and looking for more funding. That doesn't make sense to me at all. It also doesn't make sense to me, not because of the organization or the government but because immigrants are overrepresented in the poverty rates, the unemployment rates, and the underemployment rates of our country. So we can't be missing these opportunities.

As you review our best practices, I would like for the organizations to come together, pool their resources, and understand how to better access funding for which there is such a requirement. So that's one issue.

The other issue is that we need to do a better job as organizations. I asked this question to a previous group of panellists. Should you, yourselves, be taking leadership to pool all the information and all the best practices together in an easily accessible website, for example, where you, Mr. Au, Ms. Niazi, Mr. Chang, and Mr. Shan, actually say, "Look, this is what works in my organization, and these are the things that we have done and they work well"?

I'm just wondering whether this type of dialogue is taking place and what we as parliamentarians can do to help you come to that point.

Not all of you at the same time, please.

• (0945)

Mr. Patrick Au: This is a very good suggestion. Actually, one agency cannot do all things, so collaboration and networking is the way, because each organization has its own strength and its own capacity and resources. One agency cannot do the whole thing, so the best practice is just to liaise and network with the other agencies. Sometimes when we cannot do things, we just refer to other agencies. They have a better management or a program for that. This is a very good thing that we are trying to do. So networking, collaboration, and partnership are very important.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: As committee members, we'd love to go to a website and read about all your best practices, and right now we don't have that opportunity. If there's anything we can do.... I'm sure we'll be recommending in our report that some kind of portal be created so that you can all access.... As parliamentarians, we need to know what's going on, and that would be very helpful.

Mr. Neethan Shan: Through CASSA we are, today actually, launching a website called welcomingcommunitiesontario.ca. It's to complement Settlement.Org. OCASI, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, has a website called Settlement.Org that profiles a lot of things that happen in the settlement sector.

Our website is going to be somewhat complementary, looking at access-related, equity-related issues as these relate to immigrants and newcomers, through the welcomingcommunitiesontario.ca website. It profiles the work we do in various municipalities as CASSA and it also brings it together.

The other thing is that in 2005 we did the "Smart Settlement" document. At that time, many CIC staff really liked what was being suggested. I don't have a French version of it. If the ministry would fund its translation, it would be appreciated, in order to get this out as much as possible, for an understanding of settlement beyond the stuff I was talking about earlier.

As umbrella organizations, OCASI and CASSA work together. For example, we are doing a lot of work around LGBTQ communities in newcomer communities, which are often at an intersection of double barriers. These things are being shared much more broadly.

One of my recommendations is to start investing in some of the collaborative networking sessions and networking kinds of things. It could be a one-time, one-off kind of small funding that would help facilitate these things. We might put millions of dollars into settlement, but even \$20,000 into a convening session would probably enhance the quality.

• (0950)

The Chair: We have 30 seconds.

Ms. Niazi or Mr. Chang?

Mr. Joe Chang: Our perspective regarding mentoring support is to share the mentoring resources that we have built in our own organization. We're sharing with other agencies. Because of the network we have and the connections we have with them, we know they have a need, and we have some capacity, so we share our resources with them.

But this is only at a grassroots level; we have not done anything in a very broadcast manner. We share based on what we know, based on the network we have built.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Actually, we are—

The Chair: Maybe someone else will pick it up. Monsieur St-Cyr has the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for being here.

I am very concerned by the issue of labour market integration. In fact, the main criterion for settlement and integration is finding a job. After that, it is much easier to participate in society.

After participating in a variety of consultations, the Bloc Québécois realized that many new Quebecers were having trouble getting a job interview and felt they were being discriminated against because of their foreign-sounding name. A few years ago, in Quebec, a rather shocking report appeared in a Montreal newspaper, *Le Journal de Montréal*, to be specific. A reporter had sent two copies of the same résumé to a certain number of companies. One had the name Martin Tremblay on it, and the other, Ahmed Abdul or some other foreign-sounding name. The résumé itself was the same. Martin Tremblay received some 20 offers for a job interview, and the foreign fellow received only 2 or 3.

During our consultations, it was suggested that we adopt a method used in Europe, by large French corporations, among others, whereby résumés are submitted anonymously when it comes to offering candidates a job interview. So, after receiving résumés and pre-screening candidates, the human resources departments in these large corporations remove the name, gender, age and any information that would reveal a person's origin, before sending applications on to a recruitment officer. The recruiter then decides who will be asked to attend an interview, solely on the basis of the candidate's skills and work experience.

We are considering adopting that practice in Canada. Do you think this approach has merit in terms of helping people at least get a first job interview, showcasing their skills and improving their chances of finding employment, as past experiences have shown?

[English]

Mr. Joe Chang: That definitely is a very interesting initiative. But having an interview is just one aspect of it. When you get the person into the room and talk with him, there are so many things you need to find out. You can describe a person, with no name and gender and so on. There is still an element there that we need to sit down and talk to him about, which means that you probably end up a little low on the front end in doing the descriptive résumé and leave the headhunter or maybe the agency with more work to do to present it to the company. With the company you eventually have to go through the real interview. By that time, you will see that there are a lot of different elements involved. There is the language element, there are attitude problems, cultural background—all these things will surface. You will probably slow down the employment services as well. So there are pros and cons in this kind of approach.

• (0955)

Mr. Neethan Shan: I think it's a great idea, except that in the federal government we have employment equity to a certain extent. Unless the provincial governments mandate some sort of reporting back from employers as to what steps they have taken to eliminate these barriers and what benchmarks are set up for them to reach a diverse workforce pool, these issues won't disappear, because once you see the person, the next level of stereotyping and perception starts to kick in.

So it's a great idea to begin with, but the federal government should work together with the provincial governments to bring about employment equity—not a quota system, but a proactive reporting

back to the government on what steps employers are taking to make sure they are eliminating these barriers, whether of stereotyping or credential recognition or whatever may be the case.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: I think this is a very good idea. It's not only the name. We had a case where the woman was called for the interview, but because she was covering her head, she was actually asked in the interview if she could change her dress. She ended up not getting the job, obviously because of her religion and because of the dress code.

This would be a good idea, but still what is needed more is that the government and of course organizations could take steps to work with the employers closely and sensitize them about newcomers' skills and transfer of skills. Mentorship is also very important for newcomers. There is a mentorship for them to prepare them for how to present themselves at the interview. That's very important. That's also a systemic barrier that is based on discrimination. It needs to work with this thing.

Government income tax incentives would be something that would help newcomers get jobs. This would help the employers. Job recruiting is also something....

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Niazi.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Patrick Au, how many people does your agency serve?

Mr. Patrick Au: We serve an average of at least 4,500 every year.

Ms. Olivia Chow: You said 90% of your clients are referred by the police. Do you have a waiting list? So police, children's aid—people who have gotten into trouble.

Mr. Patrick Au: We have a waiting list for some of the cases, but emergency cases referred by the police don't have to wait. For wife assault or sexual assault, no, they don't have to wait. Sometimes you even have to do a home visit because something happened. These are our priority cases.

Ms. Olivia Chow: But do you have other waiting lists?

Mr. Patrick Au: Yes, we have a waiting list. Some other agencies are doing parent-child relationships, and there are quite a lot of workshops, so we would probably put these on a waiting list. If it's not a severe marital case, we would put it on a waiting list.

This is actually a pressure for the agency staff. Because there are so many urgent cases, we cannot wait. In one day our staff might get three referrals from the police and we have to do them at once, one at a time. We cannot say, wait until tomorrow or wait another two weeks. No, we can't. This is the stress we have.

Ms. Olivia Chow: How long do people have to wait for the less urgent ones?

Mr. Patrick Au: The less urgent ones have to wait at least three to six months, but we try to call them again if we have time. If, in that period of time, there are not many urgencies, then we have to call them and try to help them. This is a pressure for the agency and the staff as well.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Shan, your council represents a large group of agencies. Do some of them provide counselling services?

Mr. Neethan Shan: Yes. I think the definition of “settlement counselling” is very restrictive. They counsel on the forms and on how to get through the immigration system and all that sort of thing.

• (1000)

Ms. Olivia Chow: It's that kind of counselling, not dealing with wife assaults and so on.

Mr. Neethan Shan: That's one. Most of the CIC-funded programs or the federal government-funded programs for immigration are that way. Other funders do fund family counselling, addiction counselling, and all that. It's fragmented, in a way. Many of the agencies do have family counsellors who help with family domestic situations and youth and addiction-related problems, and so on.

It's usually organizations tapped from different levels of government and foundations and the United Way that do that kind of work.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It seems to me that after six or nine months, as you've said, Mr. Au, if you can't find a job, you're about to run out of money, and your kid is not as obedient as before, there is a lot of pressure. That's the time when sometimes the family could break up or would quarrel, and there's also the possibility of family violence. Perhaps they have a different way of disciplining the children, for example.

How does that work among different government agencies? There seems to be a bit of fragmentation, to use the word you are talking about. What is the best way to coordinate it so there can be a more comprehensive approach, so that yes, it's looking for jobs, it's mentorship, it's filling in the forms, giving this support, etc., but also it's finding some ways to make sure the emotional part stays intact?

Anyone can provide an answer for that one.

Mr. Neethan Shan: I think the key is that the federal and provincial governments are working together on the local immigration partnership. If you broaden the local immigration partnership council across the province, for example in Ontario, they can look at these other aspects of settlement—mental health and all the other aspects, not just job search and language. If they do that, then maybe it will expand.

Ms. Olivia Chow: You said it's just starting and it is a very good approach that you want to see more of. You mentioned that local partnership—

Mr. Neethan Shan: The local immigration partnership has started in many places already. Some of them are more than a year old, I think. It is a provincial as well as a federal partnership.

What I was saying is it's a good model, because it brings many stakeholders together, but its limitation is that it's still agency-led or municipality-led, not immigrant-led.

Ms. Olivia Chow: So you want more immigrant participation.

Mr. Au, you were....

Mr. Patrick Au: We fully recognize that employment is very important, but employment doesn't mean the individual has no emotional problems. The Government of Canada, with the Citizenship and Immigration program, should pay more attention to counselling and family services for newcomers. For the time being, there's not a specific program to help newcomers deal with the emotional family issues. For example, some parents send their kids back to China, and then after several years the kids comes back, and the parental relationship with the kids is totally....

Some of them have affairs, because the spouse goes to the home country; they are separated for five years, and then they come back. So this is the thing; it looks as if this is a hidden agenda, a very hidden agenda. And then when the newcomers come, they always say, “I come to Toronto, just to be truthful, because of the second generation, for the benefit of the second generation.” But if the parents themselves have problems, and then the second generation has problems, it is very costly for the governments to deal with all these things. What I'm talking about is being proactive, to help the family deal with the emotional aspects, and then they'll have a healthy second generation. This is a very good perspective, but unfortunately, this is a hidden agenda.

This is a very good opportunity for me to express my concern. And this is the actual fact. We see from the media that there are quite a lot of family tragedies happening on and on.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chow. I'm afraid we've run out of time. You'll have to wait for another round.

Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Knowing and understanding our laws is a very critical part of citizenship. We live under thousands of laws, from three levels of government, and many people who are born here don't even understand the laws.

Just to give you the best example I can think of, I don't do my own income tax. Every year I say I'm going to do it myself, and I get halfway through the process and I say, “I'm going to check with the experts”, because I think I'm going to pay too much or I'm going to pay too little. It's very complex.

And then there are all the municipal bylaws. If you're a homeowner or you're in an apartment, you don't want to run afoul of the law. You have to understand the municipal laws. For instance, you could find yourself breaking a law on recycling totally inadvertently if you put the garbage in the wrong container.

And then there are provincial laws. For instance, most people don't know that in Ontario it's against the law to be intoxicated in a public place. People who are born here don't even know that. All you have to do is look at Grey Cup weekend. And it's hard to believe that, but it's true.

Then we have criminal laws, of course, federal laws, which are the most important because the sanctions are the worst.

I was born in Canada, and sometimes I don't know the laws, so I know it must be confusing for a new immigrant. So my question is this. How do new immigrants learn the laws of Canada? Is there anything we should be doing to make that an easier process?

Maybe we could start with Mr. Shan and just briefly work along.

•(1005)

Mr. Neethan Shan: Sure.

There's a large number of legal clinics in Ontario, and some of them are ethno-specific legal clinics, so there's one for Africans, one for Chinese and Southeast Asians, one for South Asians, and so on. So the legal clinics do community legal education. Though it's very limited, it's one way they come to know about it.

Mr. Terence Young: Can they do that in their first language, too?

Mr. Neethan Shan: Yes, many of them do that in a first language. But, again, as in many other agencies, they only reach a small percentage of the population that needs to get the information.

Definitely, they need to have more public service announcements and related investments, maybe as part of the funders. The funders' requirement from CIC is some public education related to that. But it happens. Settlement workers are always in conversation with people. Front-line workers are always in conversation with people. There is the Settlement Workers in Schools, SWIS, program, which CIC also supports along with provincial governments. The young people are being told by those youth workers and settlement workers what the legislation and the rules are.

But beyond that, I also want to say that it's the system's responsibility to reach out to the population. All the law enforcement and judicial systems also need to have a community outreach segment, which goes in multiple languages, reaches out to faith groups, reaches to ethnic media, and so on, utilizing that network more effectively.

Mr. Terence Young: So you would see it as society's responsibility to inform, as opposed to the individual's responsibility to go and find out.

Mr. Neethan Shan: No, it's both sides. Individuals would go and find out.

Mr. Terence Young: I'm thinking of individuals, too, who have labour rights. If they get a job in Canada, if there's no union, who's going to tell them their rights as an employee—or as employers, for that matter?

Mr. Neethan Shan: The community organizations and advocacy groups will do some community education. The individuals will also try to learn.

As you said, if you're born here, you still do not seek out some of those things. If you're struggling with jobs and family dynamics, and so on, and settlement processes, the last thing you want to do is to read about all the laws that do not apply to you right away, unless you get in trouble—right? I think the onus should be on the individual, but for the individual to feel empowered enough to do that would take a process. That's where I think the systems need to cross the barriers.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Mr. Chang, did you have a comment?

Mr. Joe Chang: It's probably not quite the practical way, for the individuals who come, to learn the law, because as Mr. Shan was saying, you only come to find out when you do something wrong or when you're in trouble. I think community agencies can do a good job in bridging the gap. Normally the immigrant or the newcomer trusts the community service agency and will go and seek advice and referrals from those places. So the community agency can become a bridge to help out with that. That's how I look at it. It's a two-way street.

Also, Mr. Shan was talking about outreach, government outreach. Not that long ago, CIA, Canadian Immigration Advisors, came and tried to work with us to say, okay, we want to reach out to the community; how can we do that? So they brought a whole bunch of government agencies to do a road show in a mall, saying, "These are the government services agencies that can help you as a newcomer; we want to show you what can be done." In such cases, the community and the government are becoming a little closer to each other, because they are providing services to meet that interest, to know what is involved in the government.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

I notice that each of your organizations supports a specific cultural community. I wonder if you could just briefly tell me, perhaps starting with Ms. Niazi, what percentage of your clients are from that cultural community and what percentage are not.

•(1010)

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Almost 85% of our clients are from Afghan communities. Actually, you mentioned about the law. This is something that is in one of our orientation packages. Right from the beginning, from their arrival at our organization, we talk to them about Canadian law, and also about Canadian society, because the place they're coming from is quite different. We invite lawyers and people from legal services to speak to them at the LINC classes, and we arrange other forums for them as well. Mostly our counsellors are trained and talk about the most important aspects of law in Canada.

Sometimes, especially in cases of wife abuse, they won't see that this would involve laws; they would see it as a family matter. So we also have to deal with these things in a very sensitive manner. We have to consider the perspective of where they're coming from. This is a real obligation: whatever country you go to, you have to obey the laws. So we also have to make the link to their own actual beliefs.

It works very well, actually, to know how important it is to obey the law—for example, if you violate the law, you will be deported back. There's no doubt about this.

We also translate some of the material and give it to them in their own language to reinforce this orientation repeatedly to them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Niazi.

I have a brief question. Are you able to communicate with other jurisdictions, particularly the United States, the European Union, and Australia, and determine whether there are best practices used in those jurisdictions, or indeed any other jurisdiction, that could be adopted in this country?

I got you stumped, I'll bet.

Mr. Neethan Shan: Because we are an umbrella organization, we are able to do some of those things. If we were a front-line organization, we would be tied to doing front-line work a lot, because it's so demanding.

Metropolis, which is an immigration-related research group, has a conference that's held nationally every year, as well as a conference that's held internationally, around sharing best practices—across the country, first, and then across the globe—in terms of what works, what doesn't work, what are some of the patterns, what are some of the trends, and so on. They have very good websites where they share all those papers. It's mostly academics who do this kind of stuff, but much of their research is community-based as well, so it does have a community angle. So that's one place.

The Chair: The reason I ask that question is you must talk to people who come from other countries. Obviously you do; they come here. And from the people they know, are they able to say there are practices that are used in any other jurisdiction that perhaps aren't used here? Has that ever been communicated to you by new people coming to this country?

Mr. Neethan Shan: It's based on each of those themes. For example, take civic engagement; in some municipalities permanent residents can vote in their local municipal elections. Some Scandinavian countries and some other countries across the globe have that kind of set-up. We don't. So some discussions are happening around that.

Because we are not a front-line organization we don't have front-line-related information that somebody else might have. But if it's mostly to do with trends in terms of internationally trained professionals, I think Canada is trying to look at it. For example, Ontario has set up the Office of the Fairness Commissioner and other provinces are now starting to set up offices of fairness commissioners. Also, I hear it's being looked at globally. So there are some....

The Chair: Does anyone else have any thoughts? Obviously we're trying to make recommendations to Parliament to improve the system.

Mr. Joe Chang: I can only speak from the employment side. We notice when a lot of other countries talk about certification, their standards are not much different from Canada's. For example, the accountants in Ontario—CGAs—now recognize accountants from England. They can probably now look into making sure those certifications go hand in hand with countries we know are similar to ours, making the certification process a lot easier.

• (1015)

The Chair: Okay.

We're now into five-minute rounds.

Ms. Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I am not surprised that you were stumped, because I look at Canada, and Canada is really a mixed salad bowl, the United States of America is a melting pot, and Europe in general has a lot of tensions. So perhaps we are doing something good that is allowing us to do things well.

Regarding best practices, which is what the study is all about, concerning the LINC education that you do, how much of that language issue is affecting professionals? Mr. Chang, could you answer that one? And how much is it affecting the intergenerational gaps?

Ms. Niazi, you mentioned that people come from different cultural backgrounds, so the way they parent is different, the way they address women's issues is different. What sorts of problems do you face from a health issue perspective, from a violence against women perspective, on children's issues, and children's aid societies?

Those are a lot of questions, but could you address them in less than five minutes?

Mr. Joe Chang: If I may answer about language issues, language is one thing and languages involve a lot of other aspects. The cultural background is also a very important issue that is related to language. For example, a doctor's language skills are quite high. But if you are talking about a doctor who comes from a country that has a different perception of males and females, the way they practise medicine is exactly the same technically, but from a cultural background point of view, they might behave a little bit differently.

When you're talking about language, you must think about culture. You must integrate them.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: How do you help them overcome that hump, then? How does your organization help them integrate so they can get jobs as doctors, or do you think that pre-settlement...? What Immigration had decided was that prior to coming here they should get their certification done, do some examinations. Would that help them?

Mr. Joe Chang: From a technical point of view, that would definitely help, so they know what is needed to be done before they come here. But from the cultural integration perspective, I think it takes a little while before the person can integrate totally.

This is why I have tried to make some recommendations about soft skills training. When you put soft skills training into language training as part of the standard curriculum, it will really help those people integrate into the country much faster and more easily.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: It's called EQ, emotional quotient.

Madame Niazi.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Actually, language also plays a very important role in terms of family dynamics, because most immigrants, when they come here, they don't pick up English very fast. Their children go to school, and they become translators for their parents and have a controlling role over their parents. It also creates a problem between kids and the school, because the parents don't have the language skills to go to school and talk about what's happening in school.

That's very important, especially for the women. It's mostly women. In the first year of arrival here they don't go to school because they're taking care of their families and all. One of the barriers to the language programs is the criteria for attending English classes for ISAP and government-funded programs. Once they become citizens, they don't qualify for the language program. That's very important and it plays a role.

In terms of employment, when a newcomer goes to interviews, they're looking at the presentation, how they articulate themselves. They might have lots of skills and knowledge, but it's not being taken into consideration because there is a bias that they don't speak good English. They may not even speak English. The ELT language program is helping, because it's helping them to prepare for employment. For the citizens, this is a big barrier. As an organization, we do English conversation circles and all, but it doesn't help that much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Thi Lac has some questions.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good morning, and thank you for being here.

I have two questions for you. The first picks up on what my colleague, Mr. St-Cyr, said about anonymous résumés. Mr. Shan said it could be a good idea.

Ms. Niazi, do you not think that, with an anonymous résumé, people could make it to that first step, which they are often unable to do, and get a job interview? Many of us have had to hire staff. Oftentimes, during the screening process, we have a tendency to say that candidate X is the best and candidate Y is second best, and so forth; whereas, when we meet people in person, the candidate who was ranked third or fourth is often the one who emerges as the front-runner.

Despite the fact that some candidates could still be discriminated against at the interview stage, would an anonymous résumé not help

people to stand out from the pack, which would not happen if the candidate was not screened in from the beginning?

[*English*]

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Actually I said that I agreed that it would be a good idea. It's a great idea, but it's not the solution for newcomers to get jobs. It's not the ultimate solution. More work has to be done for that.

Mr. Neethan Shan: If I may add quickly, I did say that it's a good idea, but it's a band-aid solution.

If you look at the résumé of internationally trained professionals, they have to put where they received their education. There are lots of things in the résumé that may not be valued, not just a name but their experiences. If the employers do not know what IIT in India is—it's one of the most popular and most competitive institutes for information technology—if the employers don't realize that and see “India” and think this is an immigrant, then it won't be the same. I think employment equity principles would be the best way to push that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: When you talk about employment integration as well as integrating newcomers, do you not think that Canadian embassies should have another role to play? I will explain what I mean. I have billeted foreign students, including a Thai woman who came here to learn English. England was her first choice and Canada, her second. She ended up in a completely French-speaking family and did not even know that we spoke French in Canada.

So when you talk about immigrants being shocked when they arrive in Canada, is it not possible to do a better job of preparing them in terms of the information they are given and the explanations they receive about the challenges they will face? We always hear about the temperature shock, but there is also the cultural shock, which would be lessened if embassies in the immigrant's country of origin could give them additional information to better prepare them for potential challenges. For a number of years now, we have been advertising Canada as the best country in the world, but we may have forgotten to prepare immigrants for the challenges of living here.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have one minute to answer that long question.

Mr. Patrick Au: Pre-migration and post-migration settlement services are important. For example, we have clients who have studied here for the past 10 years. They go back to their home countries and come back after 10 years with their whole families. Their status changes, because by the time they come here with their families, with the job changes, it's only student status. It's free. So they still have adjustment problems, even though they studied here, after 10 years.

You mentioned that pre-migration and post-migration are very important. Before migration they know the information, but post-migration it's the existing environment that is the challenge every day. That is the reality they have to face.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Wong.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Thank you very much for coming. We have an Ontario panel today. I'd like to ask about some of the practices that have been used in British Columbia and see if they are good ideas for Ontario.

First of all, we keep saying there's no funding. However, statistics show that only 25% of the budget allocated to English or French language learning has been used.

Can you explain to us from your experience why this is happening? You are dying for funding for language training, for example, but only 25% of people are using it.

• (1025)

Mr. Patrick Au: At our agency we don't provide language classes. We just have funding for the ISAP, the immigrant settlement adaptation program. So we don't have LINC or the other program.

Mrs. Alice Wong: What about Mr. Shan?

Mr. Neethan Shan: We don't provide that, but a lot of our member agencies do. From our personal experience there are certain structural things such as reporting quarterly, disbursements, and staff turnover—you probably know about it more at CIC. Certain branch-related changes might have contributed to some of it. But we are not a front-line organization. I can definitely ask our member agencies to report back.

I think the Afghan Women's Organization is providing classes.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Our LINC classes are women-only classes. We have two classes for men in the evening. On the turnover in our classes, a big majority of those newcomers attend classes, but because of other family commitments they sometimes stay back. Most of the immigrants who come here want to get jobs. They want to go to classes part time. That could also be a barrier for them.

It's good to remember that we have two streams of immigrants coming here: refugees and other immigrants. Ninety-five percent of our clients from the Afghan community come as refugees or families of refugees. Their needs are completely different.

In general, as far as language being a barrier, families are working with the youth and they're going to school. The youth are doing very well. We did a survey, and almost 85% of the youth make it to the university level. They also get good jobs.

Mrs. Alice Wong: In Ontario we're starting a project called language training vouchers. New immigrants are given vouchers upon arrival. They can choose which agencies or schools to attend to learn an official language.

What do you think of that idea?

Mr. Patrick Au: The voucher idea is good. The people, when they speak English...most of them are from poor families. They are marginalized, and this gives them some incentive to go. It's very good.

Mrs. Alice Wong: You talked about pre-landing orientation. Are you aware of three projects happening right now? There's one in India, one in the Philippines, and one on China. Professionals are given prior information on how to apply for certification. They even get matched with some potential employers. B.C. has been very successful in matching them.

Do you think this kind of service would be very helpful?

Mr. Joe Chang: I definitely think so. Having the information before they land reduces the shock and gets them well prepared. I think it's a very good idea.

I also like the idea of giving them language vouchers. In our agency we don't provide basic language training. We don't have LINC, and we don't have ESL classes. But we focus on the employment part and give them a lot of soft skills training. We give them advanced language training to introduce them to the workplace culture.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Regarding language and workplace....

Can I use somebody else's time later...?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Okay.

Another area is about certification, foreign credential recognition. Are you aware of the fact that, jointly, we just made an announcement that there will be 14 professionals across the nation? It's not just one province, because it's a national recognition of credentials. Do you think this is a good move, that the federal government is moving nationally to help in the foreign credential recognition?

• (1030)

Mr. Joe Chang: I wouldn't say it's a good move or a bad move. I would say it's a positive move. This is something that we do to make sure that we are equally fair to everyone, but we still have a lot to logistically put in place. All the regulated bodies have to come up with a plan on how they can integrate those credentials into the Canadian system.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Yes. We're starting, so we'd just like your input down the road.

The Chair: You go ahead.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Okay.

Another thing about language training.... Again, in British Columbia, there are several language and job combined skills—we call them combined skills—training programs that I have been involved with in the past. For example, we use what we call ESP, English for specific purposes, like medical English. It is also a combination of somebody learning how to bake, to be a baker, and at the same time learning the language for it, because it's for specific purposes. Then there are pre-accounting programs, where they also learn about specific languages useful for accounting. Do you think this is also a good model to follow down the road?

Mr. Joe Chang: This is what we think is the right solution. Number one, you put the terminology and the language together with a group of people, and also you're putting the group of people together to network with each other. So that's a good move, definitely.

Mrs. Alice Wong: That's a good model from British Columbia.

And also, Ms. Niazi, about women, and especially looking for language training.... Again, in the past, there have been programs specifically for immigrant women, helping them with the workplace, etiquette, and the cultural.... Do you think those kinds of programs might be useful specifically for immigrant women?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Yes, that would be very useful. Also, referring to the job-specific language training, it exists here in Toronto as well. We used to call it ELT, employment language training. We found that very useful because it teaches the terminology, and also the workplace. That would be useful, for sure.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Okay.

Another model of training is for nursing. I understand in British Columbia, in some of the colleges—in nursing schools, in fact—they all recruit foreign-trained nurses and put them through one year of training. First of all, of course, through language training, because they have to write English exams in order to get the registered nursing status. At the same time, they are placed in hospitals for practicum as well.

This is provincial, plus the federal gives the province money, and the province actually assigns the funding to universities or colleges that have nursing programs. Do you think, again, this will be a good model to follow, Mr. Shan?

Mr. Neethan Shan: I think all of the suggestions are good. It has to be looked at in context for me to say it's a good idea. What is it replacing and how is it being replaced is the question, right?

If you're having language specific to the professions, that's good. But is it combined with the examination for those professions' certification based on that particular thing? Sometimes the English language proficiency exam has nothing to do with what's being used in that particular field. Corresponding advocacy is necessary so that if this is the training that's happening, the employers are actually accepting that as adequate training for it, right? So adding all these programs has to be a good idea, a positive idea. It has to be coupled with changes in employers and changes in hiring practices, and so on.

Definitely a lot of things like this are happening through HealthForceOntario in Ontario as well. The pre-landing is the same thing. You can only do a certain kind of settlement before they come because you cannot prepare everything ahead of time, right? So if locating services in India and the Philippines and so on is being done at the expense of immigration settlement services here, then it becomes a problem, because a lot of settlement needs to be supported here as a lot of people come.

So I think contextually it's right, it's a good thing to do, but we have to look at it beyond.

Mrs. Alice Wong: This is not a replacement at all, is it?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wong.

Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Since Ms. Wong ran out the clock and Mr. Dykstra could not ask a question, I'll just do Mr. Dykstra a favour and ask an intelligent question on his behalf.

• (1035)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I'm glad you guys get along so well.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I want to engage in a little bit of role reversal. I want you to know that Mr. Dykstra and I, and Ms. Wong and everyone here, work together with one objective, and that is to improve the quality of life and standard of living of immigrants. That is what we are driven by. We have to make recommendations. So I, along with Mr. Dykstra, Mr. St-Cyr, Ms. Thi Lac, and many others, will produce some recommendations. Then we'll debate them.

Now if you could play our role and you were writing the report, what would be the number one priority in this study of best practices? What would you say? What would you want included—just one thing, not ten—as an absolute must, a deal breaker of sorts?

The Chair: Ms. Niazi, go ahead.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: When we are looking at best practices in settlement, there has to be a holistic approach in terms of settlement, not just looking at the selected needs but looking holistically at the needs and the quality of the needs of the newcomers, and also recognizing and acknowledging their diversity, because some factors will work very well for some immigrants but not for others. So just recognize that diversity and keep it in mind.

And also, it's—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: There is no “also”. You get only one.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Okay. That's okay.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: But those were good.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Those were good, excellent.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Diversity and a holistic approach were good.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Those would be your criteria. That's perfect.

Mr. Au.

Mr. Patrick Au: Employment is important, but how has the Government of Canada responded to or addressed the harmony of families and individuals?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Mr. Chang.

Mr. Joe Chang: I would say it would be mentoring support. You can leverage a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge from among the community. So the government only needs to propagate the method, propagate the model down to the community and let the community work with these people. By leveraging those who are already here, those who have been exposed to the problems, you can solve these problems and teach the newcomers this way.

Mr. Neethan Shan: My suggestion would be to have significant investment in engaging immigrants in public processes so that there is no alienation or marginalization. We know that second-generation immigrants are also facing job challenges, having been born here or having been brought up here. Statistics Canada says that as well. So I think immigrant engagement has to be part of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's profile of work.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Thank you very much for your contributions.

I think I speak on behalf of everyone here. Since you are the last panellists before the Christmas and holiday season break, we wish you all the very best and much joy and happiness with your family and friends.

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciated Mr. Bevilacqua's comments, as usual.

I do have a couple of questions that arose from the presentation. One of them, Ms. Niazi, had to do with the three recommendations you made.

On the third part, in terms of the gap in mental health services, I do think this is one of the issues that our government has addressed. In 2006 we received a review of the mental health in the country and the focus that the country needed to take. It was actually co-chaired by a Liberal senator and a Conservative senator. It ended up being in the 2006 budget, and we actually worked through the implementation of that strategy with seven or eight locations across the country that have become foundations in terms of moving the strategy forward. I think we are moving in that direction.

The reason I brought it up is that I think the issue of mental health in this country is not subject to just new immigrants. It is an issue that we face as a country, because it is something that has been ignored for far too long. I appreciate your bringing that forward.

I just wanted to reinforce that it is an issue. I think this actually goes across party lines, despite who did or didn't support a particular budget. The 2006 and 2007 budgets, with specific regard to this issue, were supported by all parties. It is not something that we have taken lightly from a government perspective.

I have a bit of concern around expansion of the criteria with respect to settlement services for those who have become Canadian citizens, because it does open the door from a use perspective. It also opens the door from a cost perspective. I hesitate to say that I can agree with you on that point. I would like to give you the opportunity to see how we would address that issue.

If we open it up for all citizens, it becomes a very difficult issue to manage. There are opportunities, obviously, for those who have become citizens to further their education and their understanding of Canada, including the new document that has been put together by the ministry for new citizens and those who are coming to the country to be able to learn about it.

I would ask that you comment on that, because I have no idea how we would afford to be able to do that.

• (1040)

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Thank you very much, especially on the mental health. I really appreciate that.

I meant that if the settlement organizations are also supported and receive funding, especially to deal with the mental health cases, that would be very helpful. There are mainstream services, but we have the experience, when we send out clients. First of all, it's not competent for the needs of the client. There's not the understanding, sensitivity, and also the language. We had a project funded by the United Way. It was very positive and it worked very well. It would be good if the organizations were also funded.

In terms of criteria, we have met some immigrants, especially seniors, who lived here for many years and have become citizens, but they don't know their address. They have their address; they show it. There is a great need for them. They do need settlement services. If they approach us, it means there is still a need. After three or four years, people become citizens here.

As I mentioned, when the women come here, first they take care of their family, then they get some low-income job, whatever it is. For the citizenship, the language that's needed is very basic, but it's not enough to qualify them or make it easy for them to get employment, especially for people who come with high qualifications. They need higher language classes, like ELT.

We have many clients coming to our office who are in dire need of services, but we cannot provide that service under CIC-funded programs. We get just enough money to work with them, but the work we're doing is not at the same standard.

The Chair: Ms. Grewal is next.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: She's been gracious and said I could use some of her time.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

Mr. Shan, I have a couple of questions for you and also a question for Mr. Chang.

I was a little taken aback by your comment about how the South Asian communities had difficulty integrating into the country. I want to give you an opportunity to clarify.

Based on my experience, the South Asian community in Niagara, in particular in St. Catharines, has done an amazing job of integrating. And some of my closest friends...obviously, the leaders in the community, in terms of professional aspects, whether they be lawyers, doctors, or accountants, and right across the board in terms of education.... Some of the top teachers in our community are from South Asian communities. I guess I disagree with you, because certainly my anecdotal experience in Niagara has been the exact opposite. I just want to give you an opportunity to clarify.

Mr. Neethan Shan: I think we have to look at the pressure on South Asian as well as Asian communities, which are usually seen as model minorities. We talked about a lot of the issues that the Chinese and South Asian communities face. There's a lot of success in this community. People have become MPs and so on from very different backgrounds. But it's important for us to realize that South Asians are not a homogenous group. In Crescent Town there are newcomer Bangladeshi communities—most of them have second degrees, third degrees, and they are still not finding employment. If I put a posting out, I get 300 or 400 internationally trained professionals applying for a job that's \$12 or \$15 an hour.

Go to schools in Scarborough and see who is being suspended, who is being expelled. Go to Markham and see how much space the South Asian population has to play cricket. About 40% of the youth in that area play cricket, but there are no facilities. Take the city of Toronto. There's no South Asian city councillor in the whole city. We have to look beyond the engineers and the doctors. There is a class issue in all of our communities, and there is an elite group. Sometimes when we become successful in certain areas we create a smokescreen that hides a lot of problems.

• (1045)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Let me interrupt, because this discussion could go on for quite a while.

The Chair: No, it won't, Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I want to use some of my time to ask another question.

Mr. Shan, my parents are immigrants from the Netherlands. They make the same arguments that you do, and it's certainly true that there are those in our community who have risen up and those who have been left behind. My point is that this perception is not confined to one group or culture. It is an ongoing issue that we face as a country. In fact, we're going through it right now because of the recession.

Mr. Neethan Shan: There were lots of examples of domestic violence, lots of examples of sexual abuse. These victims represent a smaller population than what we are talking about, but we don't want to leave these populations out.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: On that we definitely agree.

Mr. Chang, you commented on the need to improve the soft support for foreign credential recognition. We've gone through this process. It's just been announced. We have a pan-Canadian approach, with provincial and territorial governments on side. It's only eight to eleven professions now, but it's going to grow over the next three years. I'm intrigued by the comment about the soft support. It sounds more like a community effort than a top-down government initiative. I wanted to give you a chance to comment.

Mr. Joe Chang: Definitely, we are on the front lines. We see the issues. Many of the problems related to employment and professional certification have to do with communications. How do you communicate properly? It's not just written English or spoken English. It's how you present yourself, how you interact with people. These things are very important. That's why I called them "soft skills". I think we should do more in this area.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chang and Mr. Dykstra. I think that will conclude our questions to you for this morning.

I want to thank all of you for coming. Your comments and observations will be most helpful in helping us prepare our report to the House of Commons. Thank you for coming.

The orders say that we go in camera. However, I think we'll try to avoid that, unless it's necessary. There's a budget before you. Do we have a motion to that effect?

It's been moved. Are there any comments?

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I want to know whether they are past expenses for witnesses who have appeared.

An hon. member: They are past expenses.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The final item has to do with this topic. These were our final presenters. It's been suggested to me that for the next meeting the staff prepare a draft report with a summary of the evidence and perhaps a summary of the recommendations. Or we could have a meeting to give direction. I'd suggest the first option. There seems to be a consensus for that.

Go ahead, Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young: I would like to see a report, and I'm sure the staff will do a good job. What I'd really like to see in this report is what is working out there in the field across Canada and what is not working so well. That's what I would like to see, if you don't mind my commenting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for helping me run these meetings. We seem to have had a good, productive time. We will adjourn until the next meeting, which will be at the call of the chair.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Holidays, and a Happy New Year.

This meeting is adjourned.

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