



## Serving Immigrant Families: Using Knowledge Translation to Inform a Family Approach in the Settlement Sector

Tania Dargy

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### SERIES EDITOR

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to Inform a Family Approach in the Settlement Sector**

Tania Dargy  
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Series Editor: Usha George

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## **Background on the author**

Tania Dargy holds a Bachelor of Science degree from McGill University in Psychology and Cultural Anthropology. She is currently completing a Master of Arts degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies at Ryerson University and is expected to graduate in September 2017. Tania Dargy is the winner of the 2017 Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies student contest for her paper examining refugee family reunification policy from a human rights perspective.

Ms. Dargy is personally familiar with the immigration system. Immigration policy has impacted her own family when she sponsored her spouse through the family reunification stream approximately three years ago.

Ms. Dargy has worked as a settlement worker, language integration coordinator, and community liaison for newcomer women for two years in Montreal, Québec. Her front-line experience has compelled her to further investigate the pivotal role of family in settlement in order to improve services and programs.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge my partners from the non-profit settlement sector on this project: Diane Dyson, Director of Research and Public Policy at WoodGreen Community Services, and Josie DiZio, Senior Director of Planning and Program Development at COSTI Immigrant Services. I thank them for their precious collaboration and special investment in the project alongside their multiple responsibilities within their organizations. Their input and professional expertise were central to the development of this paper and provided an indispensable community settlement perspective to inform practical recommendations.

Josie DiZio was instrumental in establishing contact with government decision-makers for dissemination of this paper.

This project was made possible thanks to my research supervisor, Dr. Harald Bauder, who facilitated my involvement in the Integration Trajectories of Immigrant Families Project and introduced me to the settlement partners. His guidance and support are profoundly appreciated.

Lastly, I am grateful to Dr. Mehrunisa Ali who embraced my ideas and helped me in the development of my research project.

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## Preamble

This paper is the result of a partnership with representatives from two influential settlement agencies in the Toronto region: COSTI Immigrant Services and WoodGreen Community Services. Their partnership was initially secured through the Integration Trajectories of Immigrant Families (ITIF) project spearheaded by the Ryerson Center for Immigration Studies. The ITIF project is an academic-community partnership funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through a Partnership Development Grant.

The ITIF project began in the fall of 2014 and involves multiple researchers. It contributes to the existing body of research on immigrant families by exploring their trajectories over time and the role of families/social networks in immigration and settlement decisions. The entire ITIF research team was involved in the collection of the qualitative data, and each researcher analyzed the data with a particular research focus. They conducted qualitative interviews with 23 immigrant families who immigrated to Canada between 5 to 10 years ago. All participating families had immigrated to Canada through the Economic Class, resided in the Greater Toronto Area, and spoke English. The participants were recruited with the help of the settlement partners, who also significantly contributed to different aspects of the project. The research findings will be published in a forthcoming edited volume entitled *Migration is a Family Affair* (Bauder). I am greatly indebted to the ITIF project team who has made the secondary data available to me for the purposes of this paper. The ITIF findings I refer to herein are those of Dr. Mehrunisa Ali's team.

I had the privilege of being involved in the ITIF project as a graduate research assistant for Dr. Mehrunisa Ali starting in January 2017. With the guidance of my supervisor, Harald Bauder, I decided to draw on the ITIF project for my master's research project. The development of my project idea evolved through ongoing communication with the representatives from the partner settlement agencies COSTI and Woodgreen since February 2017.

This project uses Knowledge Translation (KT) to transfer the research findings of the ITIF project into practical recommendations for government policy-makers to improve settlement services for newcomer families in Canada. Briefly, Knowledge Translation (KT) consists of converting knowledge into an accessible, relevant and practical format to ensure that it successfully 'transfers' to another stakeholder. Too often, academic research findings are published in discipline-specific language to a limited academic audience. The compelling findings of the ITIF project and the investment of community partners presented a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Consultations with settlement partners were held between March and July 2017 through a collaborative back-and-forth process to translate ITIF project findings combined with community-level observations into practical service recommendations. This position paper represents the combined voice of academic researchers and senior settlement practitioners; thus, I use the pronoun 'we' throughout. Its unique contribution is that it is action-oriented and evidence-based; formatted specifically for policy-makers and informed directly from evidence and practice. It is our hope that this paper can lead to improvements in settlement service delivery policy to better address the needs of newcomer families.

In this paper, I use key citations taken from the ITIF project interview transcripts as well as visual representations to illustrate findings and bring newcomer voices to the forefront. Unless otherwise indicated, citations refer to the ITIF project interviews.

## Executive Summary (English Version)

Funding from IRCC to Service Provider Organizations throughout Canada (except Quebec) has enabled 412,390 newcomers to access settlement services in the last year (IRCC, 2017d). Stakeholders of the settlement sector agree that the **settlement outcomes** of immigrants “will have significant and **long-term impacts** on the cohesion and strength of **Canadian society**” (OCASI, 2011, p.2).

IRCC, as one of the largest stakeholders of the successful integration of immigrants, has expressed its **commitment** to working with immigrant serving agencies “to build a **client-centered** approach” for program design and delivery of settlement services (OCASI, 2010, p.4). At the same time, IRCC values rigorous academic research focused on immigration and settlement to better inform **evidence-based policy**.

Upon close examination of settlement policy, we find that there is a significant **gap** between recent **empirical findings** and current **settlement service** models. IRCC-funded settlement services conceptualize and thereby treat immigrants as discrete **individual units**. However, empirical studies demonstrate that a fundamental dimension of the settlement process is experienced at the relational, social, and **family** levels. The Integration Trajectories of Immigrant Families project unveils new findings on the **family as a key unit of analysis** for settlement. This evidence provides a unique opportunity to improve the current settlement service framework.

This position paper directly targets decision-makers for settlement policy. Three overarching orientations for action were identified:

- Need to complicate the current conceptualization of immigrants as individuals
- Need to incorporate a holistic family approach in settlement policy and services
- Need to draw on empirical evidence that recognizes and lends support to settlement workers' first-hand observations and experience-driven insight

Through ongoing consultations with two prominent settlement agencies in the Greater Toronto Area, empirical knowledge combined with settlement practitioner observations were translated into a holistic evidence-based, client-centered framework for settlement services: **A Family Approach**.

Incorporating a Family Approach in the settlement sector implies a re-thinking of the framework behind program design, policy, settlement funding, outcome measurement, and service delivery, which are currently using an individualistic approach. We urge IRCC to adopt **five key practical recommendations** for the implementation of a Family Approach in settlement services:

1. Inscribe the Family Approach as an explicit framework/method of the Needs Assessment and Referral program and the Information and Orientation program service agreements
2. Add a section on the family in the Needs Assessment and Referral iCARE reporting platform, with markers to identify family needs
3. Coordinate settlement needs at the family level by linking family members' files in iCARE to reflect the inter-connectedness of needs and collect social capital measures
4. Enhance the recognition of family needs through the expansion of para-counselling support services, inclusive family programs, and social networking programs
5. Adopt an inclusive and flexible definition of family across settlement policy

The purpose of these recommendations is to **empower immigrant families** of all forms to acquire social supports for settlement and to provide both settlement organizations and IRCC with a **family-level representation** of newcomer **settlement needs** for future **evidence-based policy-making**. Incorporating a Family Approach would result in services that better address newcomers' settlement realities by taking into account the family, in all its forms, and to develop prevention of domestic violence and inter-generational conflict.

## Résumé (Version Française)

Le financement que l'IRCC octroie aux organismes prestataires de services d'établissement pour **nouveaux arrivants** à travers le Canada (sauf Québec) a permis de desservir pas moins de 412,390 nouveaux arrivants l'an dernier (IRCC, 2017d). Les acteurs du milieu sont unanimes pour dire que **l'établissement** des immigrants aura des conséquences de longue haleine sur la **cohésion** de la société Canadienne.

L'IRCC, en tant que principal mandataire pour la réussite de l'établissement des nouveaux arrivants, a fait connaître son **engagement** à travailler en collaboration avec les organismes dans le but de développer une approche de service **centrée** sur les **besoins** de la **clientèle** (OCASI, 2010). Du même coup, l'IRCC valorise la recherche académique rigoureuse dans le domaine de l'immigration et de l'établissement pour concevoir ses politiques.

Cependant, nous constatons qu'il y a un vaste **écart** entre les récentes **découvertes** des chercheurs et **l'approche de service** actuellement en place dans le secteur. Les programmes d'intégration et d'établissement subventionnés par l'IRCC utilisent une approche de service qui définit le nouvel arrivant comme **unité individuelle**. Cependant, les chercheurs démontrent plutôt que la dimension relationnelle, sociale et **familiale** est au cœur de l'expérience de l'établissement. Un projet de recherche novateur auprès de nouveaux arrivants révèle que **l'unité d'analyse** de la **famille** est indispensable pour le domaine. Cette recherche offre une opportunité exceptionnelle afin d'adapter et de faire progresser l'approche de service du secteur.

Le présent rapport s'adresse directement aux hauts responsables des politiques du secteur de l'établissement de l'IRCC. Trois principales démarches d'opération ont été identifiées:

- Revoir l'approche de service individualiste actuelle
- Incorporer une approche familiale holistique aux services et politiques d'intégration
- Utiliser la recherche académique qui reconnaît et soutient les connaissances de première ligne des intervenants et l'expertise des professionnels

À travers une série de consultations avec deux influentes agences d'intégration du secteur du Grand Toronto, les données probantes en recherche combinées à l'expertise des professionnels d'organismes ont été traduites en une nouvelle approche de service holistique, fondée et centrée sur les besoins des nouveaux arrivants: une **Approche Familiale**.

L'adoption d'une Approche Familiale implique une révision de la structure actuelle déterminant les politiques, le financement, la compilation des données, et l'offre de service des programmes d'intégration, qui s'appuie sur une approche individuelle. Nous suggérons fortement à l'IRCC d'adopter **cinq recommandations clés** pour l'implantation de l'Approche Familiale:

1. Désigner l'Approche Familiale comme étant un aspect fondamental du cadre et de la méthodologie du service d'Évaluation des Besoins et d'Aiguillage ainsi que du service d'Information et d'Orientation
2. Ajouter une section sur la famille dans l'Évaluation des Besoins et d'Aiguillage du logiciel Immigration – Environnement de Déclarations d'Ententes de Contribution (IEDEC), incluant des indicateurs de besoins familiaux
3. Coordonner les besoins au niveau familial en joignant les dossiers des membres de la famille dans IEDEC pour refléter les besoins interrelationnels et recueillir

des données

4. Accroître la reconnaissance des besoins familiaux en ajoutant des Services de Soutien de 'counseling temporaire', des programmes familiaux inclusifs et du réseautage social
5. Adopter une définition inclusive et flexible de la famille à travers les politiques du secteur

L'objectif de ces recommandations est d'accroître le **bien-être** et la **résilience** des familles immigrantes en facilitant l'établissement de divers **soutiens sociaux**. De plus, elles permettent d'optimiser la collecte de **données familiales** et la représentation des **besoins familiaux**, qui sera autant valable pour les organismes que pour l'IRCC afin d'améliorer les politiques et programmes d'établissements futurs. Enfin, l'Approche Familiale permettrait d'assurer des services d'établissement qui reflètent la réalité des nouveaux arrivants dans un contexte familial, sous toutes ses formes, et de développer davantage la prévention de la violence conjugale et des conflits intergénérationnels.

## **Introduction**

Immigrant families plan their immigration trajectories and destinations long before they set foot in Canada. Families change and become reconfigured through the immigration and settlement process. It is a life-changing event that results in important sacrifices, changes in gender and family dynamics, living arrangements, and expectations of support. Having the support of a family network is the most important predictor of settlement success (Creese et al., 2008; Lewis-Watts, 2006; Telegdi, 2006).

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC hereafter) plays a pivotal role in structuring the newcomer family through immigration policy, and shapes settlement through funding services and programs. IRCC holds the authority to enter into service agreements with organizations and represents the most important source of funding for newcomer settlement services across Canada (except Quebec). Settlement policies and program guidelines determine to whom and how services are delivered. Therefore, they have great influence on newcomer settlement outcomes.

On its Settlement Priorities webpage, IRCC (2017a) identifies as a key priority “improving knowledge creation and management through policy-relevant research and knowledge mobilization that [...] suggest concrete options for improved settlement service delivery”. Recent academic research as well as findings from the ITIF project demonstrate that immigration and settlement, in a fundamental way, are family experiences. It follows that if the settlement sector is mandated to serve immigrants' needs, they must use a service framework that situates immigrants within these social realities.

This paper is designed to inform decision-makers about research findings on newcomer families that confirm the observations of settlement workers and can guide policy. Five key practical recommendations for implementing a Family Approach in the settlement service framework and policies are being presented to IRCC settlement policy-makers. This paper challenges the current individualistic structure of IRCC settlement program design and policy. Ultimately, we seek to improve settlement services for newcomers by influencing multiple levels of the settlement sector to reflect the interconnectedness of newcomer needs with a web of social relations.

## **1. The Role of Family in Immigration and Settlement**

A review of the academic literature demonstrates there is a strong consensus “that the family, rather than the individual, is the integral unit of analysis within the immigration experience” (Cottrell & VanderPlaat, 2011, p.268). Research shows that the experiences and needs of newcomers cannot be divorced from the web of interconnections they share with family and social networks. This section reviews the impact of immigration policy on the family as well as research on the settlement experiences of newcomer families. Findings from the ITIF project are presented.

### ***1.1 Immigration Policy Impacts on Family Structure***

The 2016 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration affirms that “Through temporary and permanent resident immigration streams, Canada selects foreign nationals whose skills contribute to Canadian prosperity, as well their family members” (IRCC, 2016, p.3). Immigrants who have been selected to become permanent residents of Canada, also known as Principal Applicants, can extend admission to their 'dependents'. Recognized 'dependents' are their spouse/common-law partner/conjugal partner and their unmarried children below 19 years old (IRPR, SOR/2015). This

definition privileges the nuclear family model and prevents alternative family arrangements, such as extended family models. Thus, the support formerly afforded by extended family and social networks in the country of origin is significantly reduced upon immigration to Canada (Guruge et al., 2010; Hynie et al., 2011; Strasser et al., 2009). Satzewich (1993) observes that "the state [...] plays a fundamental role not only in selecting certain groups of immigrants but also in constituting certain forms of familial relationships" (p.316). This restructuring of the family shapes the settlement decisions and experiences of newcomers.

Family reunification in Canada is often mentioned by newcomers as a long-term goal (Phan et al., 2015). One Indian family who immigrated to Canada before the restrictions on family reunification explained that throughout immigration they "all stayed together just like a network, like support mechanisms and everything, housing, food, set up a job, and those kinds of things. We always move together" (Creese et al., 2002, p.6). Bergeron and Potter (2006) found that family class immigrants may have the most facilitated settlement process since they necessarily have at least one family member in Canada on arrival.

However, current quotas on the number of family class admissions maintain this category at a historic low, representing only 24.1% of annual immigration in 2015 (IRCC, 2016). Processing delays in applications for family reunification result in separation of family members for months, often years (Bernhard et al., 2005). Furthermore, eligibility for family reunification is now limited to spouses, common-law or conjugal partners, parents and grandparents, unmarried children below the age of 19 and related orphaned dependent children below the age of 18 (IRPA S.C. 2001; IRPR, SOR/2002). Other familial ties, such as adult or married children, siblings, cousins or other relationships are neither eligible as accompanying 'dependants' of immigrants, nor for family reunification in Canada. Unless selected as immigrants to Canada on their own merit, they will be separated. Plainly, immigrants who come to Canada with family, can only do so as a nuclear unit.

## **1.2 Academic Research on the Settlement of Families**

"A great deal of what has been traditionally thought of as individual migration should be more appropriately conceived of as family migration" (Cooke, 2008, p.255).

Research consistently shows that migration decisions are made at the family/group level and that the geographical landscape of social networks determine when and where individuals migrate (Boyd, 1989; Chan, 1997; Cooke, 2008). As Chan (1997) remarks, even when a lone individual migrates, it is the family as a whole that is involved in the migration affair. The dispersed family as 'a system of networks and linkages' that connect them to others in different places lays out the necessary supportive infrastructures, both human and material, for the success of the migration project (Chan, 1997).

As many as 87% of immigrants report having friends, relatives or both living in Canada at the time of their arrival (Statistics Canada, 2005, as referenced in Wayland et al., 2006, p.86). Having family/relatives in Canada is the most important predictor of immigrant success and integration (Creese et al., 2008; Lewis-Watts, 2006; Telegdi, 2006). Bergeron and Potter (2006) conducted a quantitative analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) which demonstrated that immigrants draw on their social capital (i.e. their connections in Canada) during their initial settlement period. Throughout the process, the presence of family facilitates access to settlement necessities (housing, employment, health) (Bergeron & Potter, 2006) and provides stability for the pursuit of long-term goals (Creese, et al. 2008). Kustec (2006) made a

unique attempt to reorganize immigration admission data into family units. He found that between 1990 and 2004, 50% of immigrants entered Canada with one or more accompanying family members, while a majority of those immigrating alone were themselves family class immigrants admitted through family reunification.

According to the family investment hypothesis, in the process of settlement, members of families negotiate their roles (gender, labor, etc.), sometimes by making important sacrifices, in order to 'invest' in the success potential of another family member (Phan et al., 2015). As explained in the previous section, immigrants' social support networks from their country of origin, including extended family, are disrupted by immigration. While the dispersal of the family may be a strategy to maximize the benefits of migration in the near future (Chan, 1997), it comes at a cost. When families are reduced to the nuclear core, sacrifices become absorbed between partners rather than shared among a larger group (Creese et al., 2008). For example, in a qualitative study with families from the economic class, researchers found that while male and female spouses may have similar education levels and labor market achievements in the country of origin, it is likely that the female spouse may sacrifice her first Canadian work experience (altogether or in terms of expected wage/skill) to support the career aspirations or re-skilling of her spouse (Phan et al., 2015). The families explain that the availability of extended family in their home country had facilitated the dual-career aspirations of the couple.

Immigration carries a number of other stressors that impact the family during settlement. Parenting roles are altered through the process of settling in a new country. Interviews with immigrant families reveal that parent-teen conflicts arise as a result of 'parenting across cultures', the identity struggles of family members, the greater English proficiency of teens compared with their parents, differing societal expectations of gender roles, and conflicting conceptions of adulthood and independence (Cottrell & Vanderplaat, 2011). Immigration affects all generations of the family, both in Canada and abroad, and continues to have implications for future generations (Falicov, 2007). In sum, "family transformations are an inevitable feature of migration" (Falicov, 2007, p.163).

Family networks, when available, provide multiple forms of support as well as a strong reciprocity and are consequential to overcoming settlement challenges (Bergeron & Potter, 2006; Bragg & Wong, 2016; Creese et al., 2008; Lewis-Watts, 2006). In cases where immigrants have weak or no existing support network in Canada, they are compelled to form new social connections. Acquiring a social network is itself a coping strategy and an 'indicator of settlement' (George, 2002). Immigrants' social networks are as important to the integration process as their level of education or work experience (Lewis-Watts, 2006). However, research shows that the social networks of immigrants in Canada are smaller than those of their native-born counterparts, suggesting that expanding a social network is harder as a newcomer (Kazemipur, 2006). Family reunification with parents or grandparents can be a valuable strategy to acquire social support and improve settlement outcomes. Contrary to the notion that sponsored family members are burdens on society, family reunification was found to be mutually beneficial to both the integration of the sponsor and the sponsored, and to society (Bragg & Wong, 2016; Creese et al., 2008; Lewis-Watts 2006; Vanderplaat et al., 2012). A number of scholars call for further research to uncover the significance and the functions of families and social networks to newcomer settlement (see Wayland et al., 2006).

Accordingly, immigration, on a very profound level, is a family experience (Cottrell & VanderPlaat, 2011). The family is a driving-force and an indissoluble factor in immigration, and as such, "has deep, far-reaching psychological and moral consequences for the individual" whose destiny is intertwined in these relationships (Chan, 1997, p.200). Families undergo important changes and adaptations during immigration and settlement, namely living arrangements, family dynamics, roles, identity, relationships, expectations, and support (Cottrell & VanderPlaat, 2011). It is only once

we turn our attention to the family that we can begin to situate the needs of immigrants. Thus, using a Family Approach in immigration research and services is necessary to address the needs of immigrants. Findings from the ITIF project support existing research and add important dimensions to this knowledge base.

### **1.3 ITIF Project Findings**

Qualitative interviews with immigrant families from the economic class reveal important findings that have implications for all levels of policy, not the least for settlement policy. Key findings selected for their bearing on this Knowledge Translation project are described below. They will be published in the forthcoming chapter *Families' Roles in Immigration and Settlement*, co-authored by Dr. Mehrunisa Ali, Marc Valade, and myself.

#### *Definition of Family*

Participants were asked to draw a socio-gram of who they consider to be their 'family'. Participants were familiar with the normative nuclear family model in Canada and consistently asked the researcher to clarify whether they meant 'just' the nuclear family or 'the whole family'. They were told to include all those whom they think of as family, regardless of pre-determined models. Overwhelmingly, in addition to spouses and children, participants included parents, siblings, specific extended family members like an uncle, an in-law or distant relatives that played a role in their lives, as well as personal or family friends, in their representations of family. One child explained "That is why I put [Friend 1] in there [on the socio-gram], because he was the person that got me connected with the other people" (Participant #11, Child 2). Furthermore, family members spread over different countries and continents. One participant included his uncle and his nephew on his socio-gram and noted that in the country of origin they had lived together in a joint family compound. Another participant's socio-gram included a family who became their close friends in Canada. She explained that she considered the wife as her own elder sister because she was by her side during her C-section. Some participants explained that their definition of family had changed as a result of immigration. This participant's response portrays the experience:

Actually, in my mind, the family means nuclear and living in one house. That is the family. But as an immigrant, I think of my friends, because they every time they support for me, like or emotionally and physically. It is not belong (sic) to my family but my feeling is like a family. You know in [country], we call to the someone, mother or father's friend who is very close, we call aunt or kind of relative... that is why I just put on my friends as a family. Also the other reason, I do not have any relative or family member in Canada. I have only my son and my husband...So I feel very isolated in Canada. So my friends are like my relatives. (Participant #8)

Therefore, important new relationships formed in Canada were included as part of the family.

#### *Transnational Support*

Thanks to communications technology, transnational social relationships could easily be maintained. Participants revealed that they relied on the emotional support of family members abroad, especially parents, and maintained frequent communication. Transnational family ties offered many different types of support: social, emotional,

physical and financial. One participant revealed that his brother-in-law loaned him a large sum of money to ease his settlement. He said "although I did not use it at all because I was having enough with me. But it gave me peace of mind and a confidence" (Participant #3). Emotional support was most prevalent: "my father he always support (sic) me in the sense like you have to be strong. In that sense, I mean emotional encouragement" (Participant #4). These supports significantly facilitated the settlement outcomes of immigrant families, especially in the early years.

However, the extent of the support was diminished with time and limited by the disjuncture of living contexts. One participant put it this way: "Now I can feel the distance is more clear, emotional distance. Even with regard to my parents...I love them, they love me...but separation you know. Like you start building different lives and so family gets distant. Me, that is my experience" (Participant #4). Several participants expressed that they missed their parents a lot and wished visits were facilitated by immigration policy: "it would be easier for my family, and everyone would be happier if she [mother] could come anytime she wants. Or if it was easier for my sister or anyone else to just come and visit" [...] "the government should facilitate families that are already here to bring family as visitors. Does not mean that they are all going to stay" (Participant #19).

Some newcomers did not disclose some emotions or events to their families abroad to avoid having them be worried or sad. Feelings of being strongly connected were still present, but in some cases, maintaining contact was energy and time-consuming and it became difficult to keep up in parallel with the fast-paced life in Canada and balancing many responsibilities, "Because right now I do not have enough time to talk to everyone. Only I am giving importance to my parents, my husband's family and also my siblings" (Participant #18). A number of participants sent gifts and money to their family members abroad as a way to reciprocate support.

### *Decision to Migrate*

One participant summed up the common themes in immigrant families' decision to migrate: "the principal reason was one, having them [children] exposed to a first world education and two, having them in an environment which we considered safe and conducive to rearing a healthy happy family" (Participant #17). The decision to migrate was made over a lengthy period and through ongoing communication with relatives or friends who were already in Canada (a sister/brother, an aunt, a former classmate, a former colleague, a friend, a friend of a friend). Social connections in Canada provided important information on how to prepare for immigration. The awareness that they would have established social connections when arriving in Canada provided confidence and security to families in their decision to migrate: "I think the most important is that they provide you with some type of security, like you know you can trust this person, you will not feel lost" (Participant #6). As another participant put it "I felt comfortable. The fact that...I know the family; it is not strangers" (Participant #12). Once they arrived in Canada, these social ties provided invaluable support, especially in the initial steps of settlement. They came to pick up the newcomer family at the airport, and housed them anywhere from 1 week to 6 months until they could get on their feet and rent their own apartments. They constituted important resources for information on where to go for things such as medical cards and social insurance numbers, orientation (transportation, weather, Canadian culture), ethnic food, and often referred them to settlement organizations. They offered advice about parenting, integration, or a first job and were called upon during an emergency. As the families progressed in their settlement process, the relational support between the newcomer families and their existing social network in Canada became more reciprocal and they were proud to say they could offer support in return "after one year, so, we were in the position to guide others for the same matters" (Participant #16). Many of the participants explained that they are now

themselves helping someone they know from their country of origin who is planning to immigrate to Canada: “We keep getting calls” (Participant #11). Support had a multiplication effect: as families acquired supports and gained stronger stability and positions in Canada, they could in turn support other newcomers: “immigrant people...they help another immigrant because they can understand” (Participant #13).

### *Social Networks*

All participants agreed that their social networks were significantly reduced and disrupted through immigration. Most participants said that their social networks in Canada were far smaller than those they had had in their countries of origin. One participant explained that her social network and family had been very close in the country of origin because her family had lived in the same community for generations. Participants felt strongly the burden resulting from the loss of precious support, especially in terms of childcare.

I was pregnant, I also need to take my older one, now that time she was only 20 months...and in my back home, my in-laws helped me take care of my daughter, so I just go to work, come home and play with my kids, that is it! But here [becomes very passionate and raises voice], I have to take care of everything by myself [very emotional]. (Participant #5)

One participant longed for family reunification: “I realize that I needed my extended family. I think I would benefit from having my sister or my brother around over here” (Participant #19). They explained that coming to Canada as a nuclear family and being separated from extended family members brought the immediate family (spouses and children) closer because they relied heavily on each other for support “We [spouses] realized we needed each other more than we would have necessarily at home. Because we had such a wide network and more supports” (Participant #17). In the words of another respondent:

So we went through the hardships together, then after...going through the hardships I feel my family more united, closer. Because you know we start from zero when I came here, nothing here, no contact here, just my husband here, me and my girls. So I feel as though we went through some very difficult things in our marriage, right now, we are all working very hard, and are much more closer. (Participant #5)

Many participants had no existing family members in Canada when they immigrated. With time, new social connections were formed with colleagues, neighbours, other parents, a settlement worker, classmates, neighbours, colleagues and bosses, co-volunteers, faith community members, newcomer program participants, sports club members, library folks, and even a stranger encountered on the street: “Family friends, like, we met them on our path....She has sort of...adopted us I guess” (Participant #11). Another participant said, “A lot of the people here are my friends but— I mean some are co-workers, some are friends, and some are like family now” (Participant #12). Many immigrants turned to settlement agencies to expand their social networks.

### *Settlement Experience*

Several families decided that only one of the spouses would travel to Canada before bringing the rest of the family. One participant said she wished her children did not have to see her suffer in the initial struggle to settle. This strategy allowed for one family member to prepare for the arrival of the others, even if it meant they were separated for

a few months. The lone immigrant did as much as possible to ease the transition for the family. One mother painted her daughter's future room into 'a princess room' by painting the walls and furniture pink to make sure she would like their new home. Once in Canada, partners coordinated their occupations based on responsibilities and their financial situation. "One person he just study, and one person working, and then, one person is working, and maybe I am studying" (Participant #2). Some women who had never worked in their lives took up jobs to support their husbands' studies. Likewise, husbands supported their spouses, "I am trying my best to help her to support her in...our day-to-day routine work, like helping her with...cooking or...doing laundry... even my son help us a lot in that case" (Participant #14). Another participant stated:

He [husband] was willing to take care of the kids, learn the English, and give me the opportunity. He was supporting me in every step during my job evolution. He was the one who was training me for the interview for the managerial position, and telling me why I am supposed to be a manager versus thinking am I able to or not. (Participant #11)

Settlement plans and decisions were inevitably tied to family circumstances. One participant was determined to learn English to ensure she could understand her children as they grew up in Canada. Each individual's personal settlement experience was greatly mitigated by the family. For example, when a single-mother's son encountered problems with the law, this had repercussions on her own emotional well-being and her conjugal relationship. In another case, a massive debt incurred by hospitalization of their child during the un-insured arrival period added enormous strain on the family. Family members supported each other in every way they could. One participant appreciated that his spouse was understanding of the decline in lifestyle and status they experienced after immigration, and for being less demanding during the period of high stress.

Thank God, I am lucky in that aspect I got. She did not put a burden on me. Even she used to share [the burden]. She was always, you know, encouraging me and she understood like after a twelve-hour work, I am really tired. She did not do unnecessary demands and you know, sometimes, they say "Oh, please take care of us." During six months. No. Never. She was really, really supportive. (Participant # 3)

In another case the wife and children made sure to stay quiet during the day to let their father, who worked night shifts, get some sleep. Regardless of whether immigration was of a single individual or a family, their experiences were very much described at the family level. In two cases, one parent returned to the country of origin to work and financially support the family in Canada, because of the lack of employment they experienced here. A participant (#15) described her family's immigration trajectory as a "family explosion", because it resulted in their separation. When families struggled with settlement challenges, they reminded themselves that the primary goal of their decision to migrate was to provide a better future for their children.

Despite all this evidence for the need to pay attention to families, the current settlement framework does not incorporate the family sufficiently. Findings represent the voices of immigrants who want to improve the services that concern them directly. Qualitative research provides policy-makers with access to the real testimonies of newcomer families. As Bernhard et al. (2005) write, "this attention to concrete family realities is the only way to appreciate the complexities of the situation" (p.3). For the settlement sector to be informed by a family approach, evidence from academia and practice must be bridged into policy and program design.

## 2. Current Service Framework in Settlement

The current settlement framework treats immigrants as discrete individual units and overlooks the group-level. As a result, there is a gap between academic work demonstrating the importance of situating immigrants within families and settlement sector practice and funding. During the immigration application process, families are framed as one designated Principal Applicant accompanied by dependents. By the same token, the family is reduced to a single individual representative who is also assumed to be the provider of the family. The Principal Applicant is selected to become a permanent resident of Canada through an individualistic assessment of his/her 'human capital' (credentials) without recognizing the complex social resources that uphold that position and the responsibilities that accompany it (Chan, 1997; Creese et al., 2008). Put succinctly, "the current discourse surrounding family migration and the immigration of professionals [...] continue to assess and value the individual over the migrating family unit" (Phan et al., 2015, p.2076).

Furthermore, almost all statistics on immigrants and immigration available in Canada are at the individual level (Kustec, 2006). We know how many individual immigrants enter Canada every year, and annual immigration quotas are fixed in those terms, but little is recorded about the number and composition of families. Statistics on the integration outcomes of newcomers are also predominantly measured at the individual level, often solely in economic terms, like in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Canada database (Vanderplaat et al., 2012). The multiple contributions of family members whose support sustains economic and social integration are disregarded.

Accordingly, government funding for settlement services is determined by a target number of unique individual clients. Assessments of these programs are also tabulated by the number of individual visits. The over-arching framework of IRCC-funded settlement programs is individualized. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa has argued that "Integration services should be provided within the context of the family and not just to individuals as separate entities. This holistic approach will strengthen the family unit" (Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2010, p.24). In the following section, the settlement priorities and policies of IRCC will be reviewed, as well as the contract agreements that delineate services.

### 2.1 IRCC Priorities and Settlement Policy

In the Settlement Programs Terms and Conditions, CIC (now IRCC) is clear that "for Canada to realize the economic, social and cultural benefits of immigration, newcomers must integrate successfully into Canadian society" (2016, p.2). As such, IRCC Settlement Programs are fundamental in helping immigrants and refugees "overcome barriers specific to the newcomer experience" to facilitate their participation in all spheres of life in Canada (IRCC, 2017b). The focus of these programs is to provide newcomers with information and referrals, language training, support with employment, and community integration. Programming is delivered by Service Provider Organizations, principally settlement organizations.

Services are delivered directly to an eligible newcomer client "in order to advance their individual settlement outcomes" (IRCC, 2017a). Since the modernization of the service framework in 2008, settlement programs funded by IRCC are now categorized into six core streams: *Needs Assessment and Referral, Information and Orientation, Language Training and Skills Development, Labour Market Participation, Community-Connections, and Support Services*. Within each of these streams, there are specific branches of services for newcomer populations with unique needs, such as women, youth, children, seniors, and refugees. Gender-specific needs and the prevention of

family violence are noted as a priority area (IRCC, 2016).

In the 2017 funding call, IRCC also declares that it is committed to "foster new (or strengthen existing) skills and credentials which directly contribute to better operations, services and settlement outcomes for newcomer clients", including "supporting the development of tools to optimize services offered by the settlement sector" (IRCC, 2017a). This priority direction reiterates an earlier commitment made to the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) in 2010 whereby CIC (now IRCC) indicated a positive stance to working with immigrant serving organizations "to build a client-centered approach" for program design and service delivery (OCASI, 2010, p.4). Programs offered to newcomers by organizations are determined by service agreements.

## **2.2 Settlement Organization Service Agreements**

IRCC "manages and delivers settlement services through contribution agreements with service provider organizations across Canada [except Quebec]" (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2010, p.2). IRCC contribution agreements represent the most important source of funding for newcomer settlement services (as much as 80-90% of total funding for some providers). Service provider organizations are diverse in their size, clientele and types of programs offered. They range from small ethno-specific community hubs, to multi-location and multi-ethnic agencies. Service provider organizations can apply to IRCC for funding based on one or more of the six program focus areas outlined above (CIC, 2016).

The most widespread service offered by IRCC-funded settlement organizations is the *Needs Assessment and Referral* program, which is designed to identify the clients' needs and refer them to the appropriate services to address those needs. The settlement worker can develop a personalized settlement plan and reassess the client in the future, but there is no follow-up strategy (except for government-assisted refugees). The *Information and Orientation* program is often done in group workshops, where newcomers are provided with information to facilitate their integration and orient them in their communities. The different *Support Services* available to help newcomers access services includes crisis counseling (CIC, 2016). Finally, the *Community-Connections* program is intended to help newcomers connect with fellow community members to develop friendships, contacts or professional networks, including mentorship pairing (IRCC, 2017c).

As indicated in their contributions agreements, service providers must report back to IRCC on their results. Depending on the program, reporting can take the form of submission claims for costs, progress reports, or annual reports with statistical data and narrative remarks on meeting the Settlement Program objectives and outcomes (CIC, 2016). Statistical reporting requirements are typically a form of performance measurement data collection that service providers are responsible for, such as number of clients serviced, demographic information (tombstone data) on clients, and number of referrals (CIC, 2011). Reporting data is also collected on an instant basis, transmitted to IRCC via an electronic system called the Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE) and is used by all IRCC-funded service provider organizations to report on services delivered to newcomers (CIC, 2016). The data collected through these reporting methods is used by IRCC to evaluate the program and determine funding renewal (CIC, 2011).

### **2.3 Towards Evidence-based Settlement Policy**

While service provider organizations are under multiple accountability expectations, there are few provisions for IRCC to remain accountable and receptive to service-level insight. This is not to say IRCC has refrained from making improvements to programs and services. It is recognized that IRCC has made significant strides over the years, the most recent example being the Gender Based Approach (GBA+) which was incorporated at all levels of immigration and settlement policy (IRCC, 2016). It certainly constitutes one such advancement and it deserves to be applauded. Nevertheless, settlement organizations' negotiating power or channel of influence to make changes to settlement programs based on their front-line observations and expertise is limited. Recognizing that "as service deliverer [...] [they] are in a strategic location to assess the effectiveness of policy and programming from a frontline deliverer/community practitioner vantage point", they constitute indispensable 'knowledge brokers' (Shields & Evans, 2012, p. 262). Their observations about incorporating the family in settlement programming strengthen academic research findings. Fortunately, the current government has been vocal about its profound commitment to evidence-based policy-making and programming.

According to the IRCC Settlement Priorities webpage for the 2017 funding call, the production of knowledge by Immigrant Serving Agencies (ISA) through research is a key strategy to generate evidence-informed policy and settlement practices (IRCC, 2017a). Specifically, IRCC calls for project proposals inspired by a Knowledge Translation approach where research on the settlement experiences of immigrants can lead to improved settlement service delivery. IRCC writes that such a project should aim to "deliver results in the area of knowledge translation and mobilization to help the settlement sector and practitioners benefit from relevant research and knowledge products" (IRCC, 2017a). This position paper is an attempt to inform a client-centered approach using the input of different stakeholders and to present recommendations. Through sustained consultations, knowledge was adapted for the purposes of settlement practice and related policy.

## **3. Proposing a 'Family Approach' in Settlement**

In order to offer client-centered settlement services that address the needs of immigrants as members of families, and for those services to be funded accordingly, settlement practitioners and academic researchers agree that the family lens must be officially recognized and imbedded in these structures.

### **3.1 Observations from Practice**

Based on consultations with partner settlement organizations (COSTI and WoodGreen), settlement workers confirm that the emotional support afforded by family is necessary to cope with the challenges of settlement. Enhancing the capacity of family support has potential to be empowering. Clients make it clear that they see themselves as members of families whose settlement decisions are heavily interconnected with their family/social networks, and therefore demand a family approach in counselling and services. Newcomers do better when they have a wider social network. As observed by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2010), social networks provide access to different types of support and information, an asset for settlement, which settlement organizations are in an ideal position to facilitate.

As demonstrated by the ITIF project findings, immigrant families always involve to

some degree a transnational dimension. Chan (1997) adds that family dispersal is often a calculated strategy to maximize the benefits afforded by migration in the near future, but it comes at a cost. Settlement workers are often confronted with the needs of clients who are dealing with immediate family separation (spouse and children). Transnational family separation requires important adjustments and is a chief dimension of settlement (Toronto Public Health, 2011). Settlement practitioners welcome the government's progress in reducing the processing times for family reunification of spouses and for making it a priority (IRCC, 2016). That, however, does not compensate for the lack of services for families who are undergoing these difficult and emotional transitions that threaten family cohesion (Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2010).

Upon taking a closer look at settlement services, it becomes apparent that there is little social support for care work, non-economic activities or emotional well-being (Zhu, 2016). This is symptomatic of a general trend in settlement programs where the provision of emotional or social support is not appreciated on equal footing with information, employment or language services. It is difficult for newcomer families to open up about challenges of a relational and emotional nature. The emotional challenges experienced by newcomers throughout the settlement process are 'common', as stated on IRCC's webpage (IRCC, 2017c), and, as such, should be an important consideration of settlement programming.

Generally, there is a lack of an integrated family approach in services and programs. Programs address children, youth, parents and seniors separately. The family is not formally recognized nor reflected by federal program structures and statistics. There is no agreed-upon framework to achieve this. The current systematic individualized structure fails to situate immigrants as members of families. By the same token, it overlooks the roles of different family members in facilitating/supporting, mitigating or hindering the integration process and program outcomes of individuals. This gap between academic research and settlement services must be addressed.

### **3.2 Defining 'Family Approach'**

The Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants writes: "As immigration becomes the source of population and workforce growth, the objectives and structure of the immigration program will have significant and long-term impacts on the cohesion and strength of Canadian society" (OCASI, 2011, p.2). Serving immigrants as members of families is imperative to properly address their needs, "families are important because when they came here, they can support each other. They know each other. They are not one individual" (Participant #21). Consultations with settlement organizations confirm there is a need to incorporate a social networks/family approach in client services.

Incorporating a Family Approach implies a re-thinking of the framework behind programs and services, policy, settlement funding, outcome measurement, and service delivery, which are currently using an individualistic approach. This structure functions as a whole and it would seem futile to address only a single strand. We propose three overarching orientations for action:

- Need to complicate the current conceptualization of immigrants as individuals
- Need to incorporate a holistic family approach in settlement policy, program design, service delivery, data collection and funding
- Need to draw on empirical evidence that recognizes and lends support to settlement workers' first-hand observations and experience-driven insight

Looking at the family as a unit offers valuable insight and a more authentic

representation of immigrant settlement experiences. This includes children, youth, parents/partners, extended family and close friends. While each family member has personal settlement experiences, most newcomers assess their settlement at the family level. A good example is Brouwer's observation that "the newcomer community does not consider anyone settled until their family is [in Canada]" (Brouwer, 2004, p.14, as cited in Bernhard et al., 2005). Speaking of her partner, one participant put it this way: "We have family, we have two young kids, we live together. So we went through all the hardship, all the happiness and all the sorrows together" (Participant #5). Another participant highlighted the role of her children in the families' settlement:

"I know you are working and carrying as much load as I am [to CHILD2]. You are working and carrying as much load [to CHILD3]. She is working [referring to CHILD4] and carrying. We are all working...Not only that...You adjust your school schedule time-table to be able to pick up your sister. Drop her on games...Like, we are all sort of working together." [...] "It is not about age, it is about how much we can rely on each other in building the family." (Participant #11)

Two participants highlighted the impact of the circumstances of parents on children:

Because when they will see their parents crying every day, struggling every day, going not well dressed. Not food, always tense... (Participant #13)

Unless the policies support those immigrant families, unless the immigrant families, especially the children, do not experience the prosperous mom, they will not have any role model...The mom might stay at home or might take some general job...the dad might drive a cab and the children or the family in general might not get the quality time to spend with their family member to teach them and to show them the way forward. I think that needs to be changed. (Participant #23)

Immigrant families have important problem-solving capacities and empowerment potential upon arrival. They are usually well prepared and highly motivated for success upon arrival in Canada. They are also incredibly resilient and ready to make some adjustments. Yet, they collectively face a number of social barriers that hinder their settlement on many levels. The purpose of this paper is not to tackle the barriers per se, but to recommend changes to the settlement framework and methodology to ensure the needs of newcomer families are being identified and addressed and that the support capacity of families is enhanced through programs, which can significantly empower them (capacity-building). With the help of the partners, we propose five practical recommendations on how services can be modified to incorporate a Family Approach while still being consistent with program objectives.

#### **4. Practical Recommendations for Settlement**

The purpose of the recommendations is to empower immigrant families to acquire social supports for settlement and to provide both settlement organizations and IRCC with a family-level representation of newcomer settlement needs for future evidence-based policy-making. This approach is more holistic and prevents escalation of family needs into crisis intervention. The five practical recommendations are the following:

1. Inscribe the Family Approach as an explicit framework/method of the Needs Assessment and Referral program and the Information and Orientation program service agreements

2. Add a section on the family in the Needs Assessment and Referral iCARE reporting platform, with markers to identify family needs
3. Coordinate settlement needs at the family level by linking family members' files in iCARE to reflect the inter-connectedness of needs and collect social capital measures
4. Enhance the recognition of family needs through the expansion of para-counselling support services, inclusive family programs, and social networking programs
5. Adopt an inclusive and flexible definition of family across settlement policy

#### **4.1 A Family Approach Program Framework**

According to IRCC (2017a), "when multiple and intersecting needs are identified, the needs assessment process should result in the development of personalized settlement plans to refer and guide newcomers along their settlement pathway". Yet, the program structure overlooks the fact that the 'multiple and intersecting needs' of individuals are interconnected with family/social networks who provide support or lack thereof, and mitigate the individual's settlement decisions. Needs assessment of newcomers by settlement workers lack a consistent framework to situate needs and resources of immigrants within social networks and families. At present, the application of family considerations is inconsistent across settlement practice: some settlement workers are attuned to family needs and some are not. Using a Family Approach will allow settlement practitioners to better identify and conceptualize settlement needs. Therefore, we recommend that it be explicitly stated in the service agreement and the program description of the *Needs Assessment and Referral* program and the *Information and Orientation* program. This implies that family considerations will be taken at all steps of the program. The framework will endorse settlement workers' efforts to include the family in their service delivery as part of funded work.

**Recommendation 1:** Inscribe the Family Approach as an explicit framework/method of the *Needs Assessment and Referral* program and the *Information and Orientation* program service agreements

#### **4.2 Identification of Family-Related Needs**

Toronto Public Health used to have funding for a program called Reunification and Adaptation Program, specifically for clients who faced challenges related to family separation or reunification with family members. In their report, they note that resources and services to identify issues relating to family reunification/separation are under-developed (Toronto Public Health, 2011). Bernhard (2005) and Zhu (2016) draw our attention to the needs of working mothers, for example, whose needs for social support are rarely identified. Families in which both parents are working, families in which parents are studying to update their credentials, versus families that are dispersed transnationally and families who are investing in starting a new business have considerably different needs.

At present, there are some programs directed specifically to parents and families, such as the Parenting and Family Supportive Counseling (Toronto), Parent Support Program (Toronto), Newcomer's Centre for Child and Family (Vancouver), Multicultural Early Childhood Development (Vancouver), Cross-cultural Parenting Program (Calgary),

Support for Expectant Parents and Families with Babies and/or Toddlers (Calgary), and Ten-week Multicultural Family Program (Edmonton) (Zhu, 2016). However, because family matters are neither addressed as part of the *Needs Assessment and Referral*, nor in the *Information and Orientation*, they are not flagged in the early phase of settlement. This lack of a preventive approach results in one of three scenarios: 1) the settlement worker goes beyond current program guidelines by correctly identifying the clients' family-related needs and provides referrals (un-funded time and work); 2) the family is left to themselves to identify their need and find services; or 3) the issue escalates to 'family crisis' level, in which case they are referred to specialized programs for family violence or mental health. While many families find ways to overcome problems, the third outcome is not unlikely, which explains why family services funded by IRCC are consistently associated with partner and/or inter-generational violence, serious conflict, abuse or mental health problems. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa notes that "there are valuable services in different languages offered to victims of gender-based violence in Canada, but a preventive approach is missing" (2010, p.18). The needs assessment is the ideal time to identify family needs and refer clients to appropriate services.

#### *Preventive identification of needs and referral*

To compensate for the absence of indicators of family needs in the iCARE Needs Assessment and Referral platform, settlement organizations have developed their own tools to ensure their settlement workers are attuned to family needs that are currently being overlooked. COSTI uses an internal client assessment form to collect data like children's wellbeing, bereavement or losses, support networks available/isolation, community involvement, family dynamics, separation, reunification, pregnancy, family law, senior services etc., and requires the settlement worker to write case notes, identifying which needs require attention in the short versus long term. Another point of comparison is the IRCC-funded Client Support Services (CSS) program offered for government-assisted refugees which uses a much more integrated and family-focused assessment. Two key measure from the assessment that should be asked to all newcomers are: "Do you have support when needed from family or friends?" and "Do you know someone in Canada you can talk to for personal matters?" This is a key measure of emotional support available to the newcomer.

"Whether you are coming into a readymade family which is you become a part of— or you are taking your own family with you. That, the need for family is very important... the family is extremely important for that support" (Participant #17). An important way to operationalize the family-approach is to devote a section of the Needs Assessment in iCARE to family needs. Based on evidence and comparative practice, we suggest three indicators that could be added to the needs assessment:

- Family reunification and separation (dispersed family, communication, attachment difficulties, recent reunification, role changes, financial, paperwork)
- Family support (emotional support, family activities, couples' communication)
- Community/social support (safe space, friends, mentor)

Capturing family and social support needs through the addition of these three simple measures would significantly prevent the escalation of family/social issues to crisis-level. Referrals to appropriate support services should accompany these fields of data collection.

### *Family information and the promotion of help-seeking behavior*

The *Information and Orientation* program contains references to the family in the section on Canadian law and justice, but only as it relates to family violence/abuse and family law. It is our position that the *Information and Orientation* program would significantly benefit from a section devoted to family matters. We strongly encourage providing information on parental roles in Canadian society, authority and child-rearing, adolescence and age of majority, family activities and family life, supporting your spouse during settlement, childcare and school, pregnancy, family planning, retirement planning, transnational support strategies (use of technology, safe money transfers), and strategies for building social networks. Providing this information to newcomers empowers them to make self-assessments and encourages help-seeking behavior by providing them with knowledge on issues they may encounter.

### *Data collection on the family and associated needs*

Settlement professionals and researchers alike denounce the lack of government data on families settling in Canada which limits the capacity to conduct informative quantitative research (Bernhard et al., 2005; Vanderplaat et al., 2012). More importantly, it restricts the capacity of IRCC to inform policy and programming decisions based on hard data. In the 2017 report by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, recommendation #32 urges IRCC "to counter the reliance on qualitative and anecdotal evidence" by establishing guidelines to track quantifiable data on family class immigration to inform decisions regarding this category (p.59). Recommendation #36 adds the necessity to gather data on the diverse contributions of the family unit, both economic and non-economic.

IRCC is informed through iCARE of the referrals given to the client for logistical services (health, school, language, employment) and also for social services (social networking, community involvement). We contend that it would be beneficial for IRCC to collect data on the family in order to get a better understanding of family needs and dynamics of settlement as a family unit. In addition to the three proposed additional measures for family needs, demographic information (tombstone data) pertaining to the family is essential. We recommend collecting the following measures in iCARE:

- Family composition (marital status, # of dependents, age of dependents)
- Family configuration (living/household arrangements, dispersal)
- Family roles/responsibilities

To avoid losing important data, settlement organizations that have the capacity have developed their own database where they record complementary information and indicators that are currently being overlooked by the iCARE data collection. This implies that settlement workers must find time to enter client data into two separate databases (internal and iCARE). Instead, incorporating family data directly into iCARE would both provide IRCC with evidence on family settlement to inform decisions and would save service providers the loss of precious time.

**Recommendation 2:** Add a section on the family in the *Needs Assessment and Referral* iCARE reporting platform, with markers to identify family needs

### **4.3 iCare Database and Family Unit Analysis**

Under the service agreement and the iCARE platform, settlement workers are required to create one individual profile per client they serve. There is no client file created for children/youth under the age of 18 because they are not considered 'unique clients' under the IRCC service agreement. Client files are created in iCARE using the Unique Client Identification (UCI) number on the newcomer's immigration document which links the settlement file to the immigration file of the client on IRCC's end.

Individual client profiles fail to reflect the inter-connected family needs. If a mother receives the *Needs Assessment and Referral* service to get help registering her child in school, or to be referred to a food bank because she cannot afford diapers and baby formula, a client file will be created only for the mother and not for the child. Furthermore, if a couple seeks services together (for affordable family housing, or for a 'joint settlement plan'), a file will be created for each partner individually, without any indication in their files that they received services jointly or that their needs were connected. Although IRCC would technically have the capacity to link family member files by tracing the UCI numbers back to the family members on the immigration application, we are not aware that this is currently being done.

This individualized filing system has important policy implications. Fundamentally, policy-makers receive only individualized data and no data whatsoever on the family as a unit. This neglects an important level of analysis for settlement: the family unit. Findings from the ITIF project showed that many settlement measures are best captured in fluid and soft concepts/outputs like well-being, isolation, household dynamics, friendship/support network, transnational support, etc., because most needs are relational. The concept of 'integration' is hardly individual; it is relational to social surroundings.

We find it particularly useful to contrast the iCARE client filing approach with the Client Support Services (CSS) program. The CSS program is a national program designed to enhance the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) and is geared to government-assisted refugees. Because resettled refugees have specific needs for care and support once they arrive in Canada, the CSS program uses a case management approach with home visits and pre-determined follow-up appointments over the first year of settlement. What is particularly interesting about the program approach is that the case management is done both at the individual and family unit level.

The CSS program is coordinated by the YMCA of the Greater Toronto which manage the centralized database on CSS files. The CSS database filing system works as follows:

A family case consists of a Head Of Family (HOF), spouse (if applicable), and all children below the age of 18. The links to all of their individual profiles can be found on the family's dashboard for easy access. Whenever you access any of the individual client's file, you can see a list of family members that are part of the same family. Children over the age of 18 are recorded as a separate file, since they are receiving their own needs assessments. The database allows for these members to be linked to their parents' family as well, since the database allows for any client to be a part of more than one family (for example, their own and their parents'). - Nicoleta Monoreanu, National Programs Manager, YMCA of Greater Toronto (Personal Communication, July 27, 2017)

The CSS program filing system serves as a good reference to suggest a similar template for iCARE, but without the case management aspect of the CSS program. This technique would provide settlement organizations and IRCC with a representation of family level needs, not only individual level. When needs that are relational are identified, a link to the 'family dashboard' or to the specific family member could be inputted.

Promoting a family approach in the *Needs Assessment and Referral* service does not necessarily entail referral for family counseling. Rather, it means addressing the needs of an individual in relation to a family (i.e. while recognizing that doing so has an impact on other family members' settlement as well). Suppose a client who is married requests assistance in finding employment, but confides that she is worried about the ramification of her working on her spouse who is himself struggling to find work and 'under a lot of stress'. In this circumstance, the settlement worker, understanding that the client is referring to stressors of gender role reversal and implications for family tension, strongly recommends to her client that her spouse make an appointment for referral to employment services as well. Seeking settlement services always remains voluntary, and we recognize that individual members have different needs, but they do not stand alone; their trajectories affect each other. It is possible to address the family without getting into 'family politics', so to speak. Settlement partners on this project have made it clear that settlement workers are doing this work already, albeit informally. It is our position that this type of relational information should be reflected in iCARE to match the reality of newcomers served.

**Recommendation 3:** Coordinate settlement needs at the family level by linking family members' files in iCARE to reflect the inter-connectedness of needs and collect social capital measures

#### **4.4 Social Support Capacity-building**

Immigrants are deeply affected by the 'shrinking' of the family that results from immigration, the limited family reunification options, and the loss of social networks. In the words of one participant: "Born in [country x], grown up in [country x], of course lots of friends, family, lots of connections. Feel like [a] human being in [country x], but now no." (Participant #9). Their social networks in Canada are smaller than those from their country of origin. This validates the idea that building a new social support network as an immigrant in Canada is difficult. It is especially concerning since the smaller the network the lower the likelihood of it offering different types of support (Bergeron & Potter, 2006; Kazemipur, 2006). In the academic literature and the ITIF project findings, different types of supports were identified: informational, social, emotional, physical, financial. In a study by Simich et al. (2005), social support was found to benefit newcomers by "fostering a sense of empowerment, community and social integration, building networks, sharing experiences and problems, reducing stress, and contributing to physical and mental health" (p.263). The optimization, empowerment and capacity-building of newcomers' social support networks is guaranteed to yield positive results. Enhancing the social supports of newcomers deserves to be a stand-alone settlement objective with adequate programs.

##### *Social network facilitation*

Under the current structure of the *Needs Assessment* in iCARE, the settlement worker is required to assess the needs of the client based on different settlement objectives. One of the settlement objectives is to acquire knowledge of social networks, professional networks, community services or community involvement. According to consultations with settlement partners, clients who are identified to be in need of social networks, like seniors, are referred to senior groups or English conversation circles. Other settlement organizations said they referred clients to *Language Instruction for Newcomers Clients* courses, *Information and Orientation* workshops, which offer a secondary opportunity to make connections and socialize, even if networking is not a

service agreement objective/outcome of these programs. Overall, settlement partners said they recognize that newcomers do better when they have a wider social network, but that programs dedicated to this objective were scarce.

The *Community-Connections* stream of the six Settlement Programs is an IRCC initiative as part of the modernized service framework to foster social networks. *Community-Connections* programs are community-specific and place-based (organization, schools, libraries). Their objective is to "foster active and meaningful connections between newcomers and host communities, and enable newcomers to develop a sense of belonging" (Burr, CIC, 2011, p.1). These include community activities, public institution outreach to communities, cross-cultural activities, mentoring and networking (CIC, 2016). One participant in the study referred to the program this way:

This is a central discussion program. They have in some libraries... they offer discussion that the people gather from every—the immigrants...It makes their communication better and it makes their socialized...that is great. I think that is a good program but it is not very common. Not in every library. (Participant #15)

In her report, an IRCC policy analyst writes that "while these programs give essential support, there is an appetite for broader engagement" (Burr, CIC, 2011, p.3). According to settlement partners, the *Community-Connections* programs they had encountered were predominantly geared towards professional mentorship. Nonetheless, they agreed that the *Community-Connections* program has potential to be significantly expanded because of its core values that align with a social network/community-building approach. We strongly urge IRCC to pursue the development and funding of *Community-Connections* programs, especially those targeting the development and enhancement of social support networks.

#### *Tackling unmet needs: emotional support/counseling*

I think we should have newcomer focus groups, we have focus groups for people who may have a drinking problem, but why do not we have a focus group for newcomers who are having difficulty finding a job? ...And also to provide mental support for the people. Seriously, I would say the mental health of the newcomers is very important. Because if a person suffers from this, the whole family will suffer from this. So in the end it is going to be a problematic family. (Participant #6)

Newcomers interviewed in the ITIF project turned to settlement agencies for instrumental, social and informational needs, but they also sought services to respond to emotional needs. IRCC accepts that emotions of despair, frustration and isolation are a natural part of settlement in a new country (IRCC, 2017c). However, services for emotional support are lacking in the sector: "lack of counselling or coaching, which is very much needed for any immigrants. Mental support [...] so they [immigrants] will not be broken down." (Participant #13). In fact, consultations with settlement partners revealed that providing 'emotional support' to a client does not fall under the definition of advancing the settlement of newcomers. Rather than constituting a service on its own, emotional support is not accounted for and is positioned outside of 'progress' in IRCC settlement terms. In these instances, settlement workers are caught between the contradicting terms of their obligations and the needs of newcomers. Settlement workers for the most part steer away from the family matters of their clients unless there is domestic violence or serious inter-generational conflict, in which case they refer them to family crisis counseling, if culturally-sensitive services are even available at all. Waiting times for family counseling services are very long. The *Report of the Standing*

*Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on Best Practices in Settlement Services* published in 2010 (after the modernization of the service framework), identifies needs that are unmet by settlement services. The Committee reports that family counseling is "not adequately covered by settlement funding" (p.7). They stress that if met, it would lead to increased well-being and better settlement prospects for immigrants. The positive impacts of counselling can have returns for many inter-connected newcomer families.

Clients can be reluctant to speak openly about family problems or emotional support needs because of the stigma associated with them. They usually come forward for help regarding family reunification paperwork or if they are experiencing abuse/crisis. Needs for emotional support and families are consistently associated with specialized services for domestic violence or family dysfunction/crisis (see IRCC, 2017a). In those instances, a case management approach is used where family counselling is provided, often in conjunction with mental health assessments. This approach pathologizes family needs, but most importantly, it addresses family needs when they have reached a level of crisis rather than preventing escalation. We argue that services providing emotional support could play a key role in prevention. It is essential that emotional support be offered through a recognized form of service on par with employment, housing or information needs. On the IRCC webpage, para-counseling is referred to as a *Support Service* available to newcomers. Settlement partners were not aware of funding for para-counseling as a *Support Service* offered in tandem with the *Needs Assessment and Referral* service. We strongly recommend the systematic deployment of para-counseling *Support Service* in service agreements with organizations who offer the *Needs Assessment and Referral* program. Finally, we appeal to IRCC to develop family support programs that are holistic and adapted to newcomer-specific realities.

The 2017 *Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration* recommended that IRCC fund programs to support the unique needs of Canadian families who face delays and separation during the sponsorship of spouses and children. Toronto Public Health (2011) and scholars also call for programs such as support groups specific to family separation and reunification (Bernhard, 2005; Falicov, 2007). Children who endure separation/reunification are torn between emotions. One participant in the ITIF project, a 10-year-old who reunited with her mother after 10 months of separation, explained that she was very upset to leave her grandparents and uncle who she was living with, but relieved to see her mother at the airport. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2010) stresses that there is a pressing need for better support programs for immigrant parents/families that embrace 'inclusive family support models' and that are culturally competent.

For example, in a three-year pilot project, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration funded the *Newcomer Youth Program*. All newcomer youth were eligible for participation (not limited to 'crisis cases') and were recruited by settlement organizations. Their program approach involved sessions with the whole family as well as with the parents. They evaluated the outcomes of the program by measuring improvement in inter-generational relations, family dynamics, participation in family activities, and participation in volunteerism or community activities. The contract agreement specified that the expected project outcome was "newcomer youth have social and family connections that facilitate bonding (sense of belonging), cultural and intergenerational bridging and civic engagement". In the annual program report, organizations outlined the importance of connecting with parents in order to access the youth.

**Recommendation 4:** Enhance the recognition of family needs through the expansion of para-counseling support services, inclusive family programs, and social networking programs

#### **4.5 Inclusive Definition of Family**

An important finding of the ITIF project is the changing and fluid definition of family that newcomers had. Strong ties that are developed with existing networks in Canada (in some cases with new acquaintances that are met upon arrival) became, over time, akin to a 'family member'. As explained by Holstein and Gubrium (1999), "the essence of family is found in the way family is *used*, not in conventional or idealized social forms" (p.7). "Biological, moral and legal kinship terms...do not communicate meaning in terms of commitment, caring, and obligation" (Smith, 1993 as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1999, p.6-7). As such, households should not be conceptualized as homogenous entities; families are fluid, inseparable from internal dynamics, and changing depending on needs (Creese et al., 2008). This finding demonstrates the importance of real lived experiences of identity which inform who is family.

Yet, as noted by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2010), Canadian institutions rely on the nuclear model which prescribes the involvement of parents at school, in the integration of children and even in the justice system. This 'intact-nuclear-family-model' does not always hold or reflect newcomer realities. In many newcomer families, multiple members, including extended family may play a role in the care or rearing of the child. Family transformations resulting from immigration entail shifts in decision-making powers and roles of support (Falicov, 2007). In cases of separated/multi-local families, it should not be assumed that the 'parental authority' lies with the parent or that its locus is in the household (Bernhard et al., 2005). Most importantly, Bernhard et al. (2005) emphasize that these diverse family forms "are not 'deficient' or 'defective' family units simply because they do not conform to the traditional model of the nuclear single-site family" (p.2). Research shows family/social support is the most important indicator of success for settlement and integration. Policy at all institutional levels should support the participation of an extended family member with a lasting relationship to the child. To reflect the conceptualization of family of newcomers themselves, important family and social supports should be valued and upheld by institutions. This measure will strengthen newcomer families and empower them.

Therefore, newcomer families require policies with an inclusive and flexible definition of the family unit. The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has expressed this position:

Canadians recognize the immeasurable importance of parents and grandparents and other extended family members in our lives, in our families and our communities. It is time for the government to also recognize and expand our understanding of family, in a world where extended family networks are essential to personal and community success. For new immigrants, they are part of a support network that is critical to make a successful adjustment to a new country. (OCASI, 2011, p.1)

It is our final recommendation that policy-makers at all levels of government, and in this case specifically in IRCC settlement policy, adopt the definition of 'chosen' family. It is crucial that newcomers themselves be allowed to define who they consider as family, perhaps not in terms of a specific kinship position (Daniel, 2005), but in terms of sharing/providing support. The 'chosen' family is the family as defined by the newcomer client and must be the benchmark for a Family Approach settlement policy.

**Recommendation 5:** Adopt an inclusive and flexible definition of family across settlement policy

## Conclusion

This position paper informs an evidenced-based service approach for IRCC policy-makers in the settlement sector. It translates academic literature and research findings from the ITIF project into practical format for uptake at the policy level. The perspective of service provider organizations was incorporated through consultations with two reputable, multi-local settlement organizations in the Greater Toronto Area. Their participation strengthens this paper and complements IRCC's priority to build a client-centered sector.

Academic research and ITIF project findings demonstrated that newcomers' settlement experiences are deeply intertwined with the family. Yet, immigration policy and IRCC-funded settlement services continue to operate using an individualized framework. In this paper, we made the case for paying attention to families. We argued for the implementation of a Family Approach in settlement services building on three policy orientations:

- to complicate the conceptualization of newcomers as individuals
- to incorporate a holistic family approach in settlement
- to draw on empirical evidence that supports settlement workers' first-hand observations

Finally, through consultations with partners, we devised five practical recommendations for the implementation of a Family Approach in IRCC-funded settlement services, program design, data management and collection, and operational definitions:

1. Implement a Family Approach framework/methodology in the Needs Assessment and Referral program and the Information and Orientation program description and service agreement
2. Add a section on the family in the Needs Assessment and Referral iCARE reporting platform, with markers to identify family needs and social capital measures
3. Coordinate settlement needs at the family level by linking the family members' files in iCARE to reflect the inter-connectedness of needs
4. Enhance the recognition of family needs through the expansion of para-counseling support services, inclusive family programs, and social networking programs
5. Adopt an inclusive and flexible definition of family across settlement policy

At the heart of the ITIF project and ultimately this paper is the goal of improving settlement services available to newcomers. We trust that the government has every intention to do the same and we encourage that a course of action towards the implementation of a Family Approach be taken accordingly.

If I get the opportunity to talk to an official I will... [say that] the route for the success of Canada is family. If an immigrant family is a broken one, the whole Canadian system ultimately ends up being broken. The base for the success of the country is a family" [...] "if there are so many successful families, there would definitely be a successful Canada" [...] "That same policy that invited them must support them. [PARTICIPANT #23]

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