



**SOCIAL SERVICES
Employment & Income Support**

TO: Chair Jane Brewer and Members of the Community Services Committee

DATE: March 7, 2006 **FILE CODE:**

SUBJECT: REGIONAL COMMITMENT TO IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Regional Municipality of Waterloo support the creation of and staff involvement in the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network, as outlined in report SS-06-012, dated March 7, 2006.

SUMMARY:

The Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN) is a multi-sectoral network of individuals and organizations, established to attract and integrate skilled immigrants into the Region of Waterloo. WRIEN is a result of the April 2005 Immigrant Skills Summit. The work of WRIEN complements both the goals and programs of the Region of Waterloo and will enhance Human Services planning within the Regional Growth Management Strategy.

REPORT:

1.0 Immigrant Skills Summit

On April 28, 2005 Waterloo Region held an Immigrant Skills Summit, sponsored by 16 organizations including the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. This half-day event brought together a cross-section of 179 community members, including labour, business, government, politicians, education, community-based organizations and immigrant groups. The goals were to invite input and obtain commitment to a set of action plans to attract and integrate immigrant skills into the Region's labour market.

Waterloo Region is a rapidly growing area with a forecasted population in excess of 700,000 by the year 2031. According to the 2001 Census, immigrants make up 21% of the Waterloo Region population. In addition, Statistics Canada estimates that by the year 2011, 100% of Canada's net labour market growth will be provided by immigrants. An adequate supply of talented workers is needed to ensure the continued prosperity of the Region and maintain its citizens' quality of life.

Many new Canadians face significant barriers in their search for employment which affects their overall health and well-being. The unemployment rate for recent immigrants in Waterloo Region is 14% (as compared to 5% for Canadian born individuals). Many move to our community with university degrees, skilled trade certifications or other higher learning designations from their country of origin. Recent immigrants are more highly educated than the immigrants of the past (the proportion of university educated immigrants rose from 19% to 42% between 1980 and 2001). While in 1980 recent immigrant men received 17% lower earnings than Canadian-born men, by 2000 this group received 40% lower earnings. The attraction and integration of skilled immigrants is critical to the future growth and prosperity of this Region.

2.0 Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network

Many of the individuals and groups involved in the Immigrant Skills Summit reinforced the need for a number of initiatives to enhance the ability of this community to recruit and retain skilled immigrants and to connect skilled immigrants with interested employers. They also reinforced the need for an organization to facilitate and coordinate these initiatives on a comprehensive, Region-wide basis.

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) and the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce have been co-leading the follow-up from the Immigrant Skills Summit. This process has led to recommendations to establish a Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN). The group would:

- Facilitate the development of a comprehensive overall regional strategy for immigrant attraction and employment
- Table and assist in the resolution of overlaps and gaps in service delivery
- Act as a clearing-house of information on immigrant employment programs/services
- Provide a framework from which priorities and strategic choices can be made
- Act as a catalyst (not a bureaucracy) to encourage the efforts of existing programs
- Coordinate and integrate (not duplicate) the many community initiatives promoting immigrant employment
- Facilitate partnerships among all stakeholders
- Advise funders to ensure efficient allocation of financial resources
- Leverage more investment from senior levels of government for regional immigrant employment initiatives
- Lobby senior levels of government and professional bodies to make legislative changes that facilitate more immigrant employment.

WRIEN would have a three year mandate. The rationale for a fixed-term is that it is envisioned that the partnerships, programs and strategies created during this period would be incorporated into the annual budgets and program plans for employers, the community based organizations and government agencies involved in this issue.

As described in the attached request for funding, the current concept is that the Network would be hosted by the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, and would have a small staff (approximately 2 FTE's). The budget would be approximately \$300,000 per year for three years. The hope is that funding (cash or in-kind support) would be provided by various government agencies, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector. The Region of Waterloo has been asked to contribute \$50,000 per year for three years to this initiative.

WRIEN is seen as a flat structure involving representatives from six key groups: funders, business, immigrants, government, educational institutions and community-based organizations. The Region of Waterloo through the Chief Administrative Officer participates on the Steering Committee and staff from Human Resources and Social Services (Employment & Income Support) are members of three of the five working groups. The anticipated start date is March/April 2006.

3.0 Potential for the Region of Waterloo

The importance of immigrant employment to the future health, well-being and prosperity of the Region is clear. The relationship to the Region's Growth Management Strategy and, in particular, the Human Services Plan is obvious.

As an employer the Region will need to develop and then implement those sensitive and responsive human resource practices, which consider the needs of skilled immigrants. These skills will be

increasingly necessary to address the pending skills shortage that will occur over the next 10 years as the baby boom generation moves through the Region's labour force.

In Social Services (Employment & Income Support) it is important to partner with interested individuals and organizations such as interpreter services to support those who approach us for financial and employment support. At the same time, advocacy may be required with other levels of government to ensure that the qualifications and experience of immigrants are recognized and fully utilized.

Public Health has produced three statistical reports on the status of immigrants in Waterloo Region aimed at raising community awareness. New specialized programs for this population (immunization clinics, child health fairs, tobacco cessation programs), and active outreach with existing programs are driven by the requirements of the Equal Access Standard of the Mandatory Health Program Standards. Public Health maintains active working relationships with settlement providers in Waterloo Region to continuously assess and respond to the trends and needs of this population. There has been strategic recruitment (e.g., family visitors in Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, new Peer Program funding) to reach out to the immigrant population. Public Health is preparing a report on immigrant issues as part of the Human Services plan of the Region of Waterloo Growth Management Strategy. WRIEN will assist in identifying and clarifying issues and barriers, which will strengthen our Human Services planning.

The above is not intended as an exhaustive report on the many links and great potential to be realized from the Immigrant Employment Network. Certainly from the perspective of the Region, there is much to be gained in terms of future well-being. As a Corporation our programs and services can be greatly enhanced.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:

Support of the Network will address the Corporate Strategic Plan, Focus Area 1: to manage Regional growth to enhance quality of Life and Focus Area 2: to enhance community health and social well-being. Finally, by recruiting and retaining skilled and competent staff, this involvement addresses Focus Area 5: to ensure operational effectiveness and efficiency.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Region through its 2006 budget process approved one-time funding of \$50,000 per year for 2006, 2007, and 2008 for the Immigrant Employment Network. At this time, funding of approximately \$200,00 per year for each of the next three years has been committed by a variety of agencies including: the United Way of Kitchener Waterloo and Area, the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries, The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation and the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. A response has not been received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The business community has financially supported the development of WRIEN, and will continue to provide in-kind support via the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce.

OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSULTATIONS/CONCURRENCE:

Staff in Human Resources, Public Health and the Office of the Chief Administrator have been consulted.

ATTACHMENTS

A - Letter from Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

PREPARED BY: *David Dirks*, Director, Employment & Income Support
Daniela Seskar-Hencic, Manager, Planning & Evaluation, Public Health

APPROVED BY: *Michael Schuster*, Commissioner, Social Services
Dr. Liana Nolan, Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health