NEWCOMER CONSULTATIONS ON THE CONTEXT OF EARLY LEARNING AND CARE IN EDMONTON

FINAL REPORT

EDMONTON COUNCIL FOR EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

JUNE 2019

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THE MULTICULTURAL FAMILY RESOURCE SOCIETY IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT UNDERTAKES PROGRAMMING AND ADVISORY SERVICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS ITS MISSION OF STRENGTHENING AND EMPOWERING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES TO ACHIEVE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (the precursor to the current Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC)) sought to consult with newcomer communities in Edmonton, specifically in regard to planning a centralized system of early learning and care that honours the realities of marginalized families and works to mitigate and remove institutional and/or systemic disadvantage for these families.

The information from these consultations will be used to ensure ECELC's activities take into account the lived experiences of newcomer families and that it considers an inclusion/equity lens in its work as it moves forward.

Multicultural Family Resource Society (MFRS), one of the ECELC members, was approached to conduct this work on behalf of the Council through MFRS Coaching, Advisory, and Research Services.

PROCESS

The consultations involved meeting with key groups of people to learn about what is already known about this topic and to identify who some of the 'knowledge keepers' are on this topic. MFRS consulted with Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative; Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre; Intercultural Child and Family Centre; University of Alberta, Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP); MacEwan University, Human Services and Early Learning and Care; and Muslim Community of Edmonton (MCE) Child Care Centre to assess what work has already been done recently on the topic of newcomer families and early learning and care and to identify existing groups of practitioners and community members that would be good candidates for further consultation. The consultations also sought to identify facilitators for future conversations as community consultation often generates the richest data when the facilitators are known to participants and this would be an important aspect to future ECELC work.

The following methods were used in this consultation process:

Key Informant and Focus Group Interviews – the authors of this consultation report interviewed community brokers, community agencies, and academics/researchers in individual one-on-one and focus groups settings. A semi-structured interview guide was created with input from ECELC stakeholders (Appendix A). In total, we conducted:

- 1 focus group
- 2 interviews with research and academic institutions
- 3 interviews with community agencies

Document Review – the authors reviewed ECELC background materials to gain an understanding of the context for the consultations and how the data might be integrated into the vision, mission, principles, purpose, and responsibilities of the Council. They also reviewed any documents that were provided by key informants to identify themes related to newcomer families and early learning and care.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND KEY INSIGHTS

- Newcomer families are very diverse and even within a category such as "immigrant" there is much heterogeneity. ECELC can benefit from engaging a multiplicity of newcomers and those who work closely with newcomers.

- Some of the realities for newcomer families mirror the realities for other families in Edmonton when it comes to issues such as poverty or racialization and how that affects experiences of early learning and care.

- There is a knowledge-to-action gap that runs through many of the sub-themes. The authors suggest that it might be less important to keep consulting with newcomers and newcomer-serving organizations (without specific actions identified) than to look at how meaningful change can occur (for example, what would it take to have the sector *implement* equitable early childhood assessments and evaluation?).

- As ECELC works to build a centralized system, it must be cautious not to conflate centralization with top-down standardization. Newcomer families and those who serve them in early learning and care spaces need flexibility to be creative and responsive

- ECELC must also be a model of how to engage newcomer families and agencies in an authentic way, using a partnership approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis on a specific initiative (e.g. to make the case for creating hub models for service or to implement a bridging program for newcomer women to work in the early learning and care sector).

- Document the "invisible" work of the early learning and care sector (see pp. 15-16 on early learning and care agencies supporting families with basic needs). Use this information to advocate for additional funding, partnerships (e.g. hub model, etc.), or to more adequately fund other agencies that can help with newcomer settlement and integration.

- Invest in evaluation of programming and services, especially when it comes to cultural responsiveness and equity. For example, are the concepts of equity within the Flight curriculum framework implemented into practice and can we measure an increase in positive outcomes for those who have been most marginalized in early learning and care (and other social systems)? Or, can we take a snapshot of what planning for child care/early learning looks like now for newcomer families and then compare that with data five years later?

- Create a profile of affordability of early learning and care with a breakdown of immigration status and lines of poverty/non-poverty. For example, temporary foreign workers do not get subsidies whether they are low-income or high-income. Use this profile to understand that if some subsidies were altered, it would have no effect on certain newcomer realities.

- Find ways to minimize language-related barriers for newcomer families, including actions that work to connect newcomer families with services, improve communication between child care workers and families or provide flexible child care supports for parents who need to take language classes. Projects and programs in this area could include integrating cultural brokering services, part-time employment of parents with language skills to help with interpretation, etc.

- Develop a systems navigator for early learning and care programs and services.

- Engage newcomers and those who work with newcomers in the design and implementation of policies, regulations, and practices that will affect newcomer children and families.

- Map all the other agency/system interconnections with early learning and care programs and services.

- Develop a hub model for newcomer families accessing early learning and care.

- Support the development and delivery of education for child care workers, early childhood educators, and others (perhaps even families) about newcomer realities (pre-migration history, differing needs, cultural responsiveness, etc.). Build in an application-to-practice component so the education sessions result in changes that improve policies and practices for newcomer families.

- Education for ECELC around diversity, inclusion, and equity so all stakeholders have a common understanding and know how these concepts might be applied in the Council's work as well as within individual agencies.

- Education for early learning and care sector on bias, intercultural practice, diversity, inclusion, equity.

- Implement culturally appropriate ways to assess newcomer children, building on research and tools that already exist.

- Define intercultural competencies for the sector and create a competency framework based on roles (e.g. child care worker, director, etc.). Use competencies in job descriptions, hiring, orientation, and performance measurement.

- Improve coordination of early learning and care services for newcomer families and the sharing of information with newcomer families.

- Early learning and care programs and services are supported to develop a diversity/inclusion/equity policy which includes a procedure around the evaluation of the policy by families, staff, board members, and partners.

- Develop job descriptions (not just job postings or advertisements) for board members and other leadership roles in early learning and care through an equity lens (i.e. using plain language, clearly sharing expectations and explaining what is required, etc.). Use new recruitment strategies to engage newcomers and other diverse board members.

- Engage newcomers and those who work with newcomers in design and implementation at the policy, regulation, and practice level of the "centralized" system. Ensure that the engagement is facilitated in a participatory manner; for example, meaningfully giving exposure to understanding the systems that exist and building capacity for those who have been traditionally marginalized in systems to develop their own thinking and ideas (i.e. inclusion not assimilation).

- In developing solutions, seek to understand the systems that are supposed to be helping newcomers and those that are actually doing the work (incorporate a holistic/systems approach to support real, positive outcomes for newcomer communities in the short-term and long-term).

- Develop education for the settlement/newcomer-serving sector about early learning and care options.

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BACKGROUND

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DEFINITIONS

WHO ARE NEWCOMER FAMILIES/COMMUNITIES?

Although there are many definitions of "newcomer" we are using this term as an all-encompassing category for this consultation. It includes those who have arrived in Canada as immigrants, those who arrived as refugees, and those who fall outside of these two groups (i.e. those who are awaiting refugee claims, temporary foreign workers, international students, etc.).

IMMIGRANTS

Immigrant families have chosen to come to Canada and have applied and been accepted into the country, usually through the economic or family class of immigration. Although immigrants make a conscious decision to move here, they still face many barriers in their settlement and integration within Canada, such as lack of recognition of foreign credentials; negative biases about their accents, language

skills, motivation, etc.; racism; and poverty. However, immigrants make many positive contributions to the communities they settle in. They have lower crime rates[1], raise academically successful children (although this is mediated by immigration status and other factors)[2], and are engaged in their neighbourhoods and communities.

REFUGEES

The formal definition of a refugee comes from the 1951 Refugee Convention, established by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). It states that refugees are persons who have fled their nation-state "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." Unlike immigrants, refugees may have never thought about coming to Canada, and are therefore less prepared when it comes to knowledge of English or French, job qualifications that match the Canadian labour market, and connections with family members and other supportive networks in Canada.

Refugees may be Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) or Privately-Sponsored Refugees (PSRs). Although the government (or a private sponsorship group, in the case of PSRs) provides one year of resettlement support for refugees, refugees face many challenges when it comes to accessing adequate services around employment, housing, language training, schooling, and mental and physical health. In the case of GARs, the government also issues each family a Refugee Transportation Loan for up to $10,000 to cover their travel fees and medical exams to get into Canada (unless the family has enough funds to pay their own way, which is unlikely, especially now that Canada is selecting the most vulnerable refugees rather than the "best qualified" refugees). The family then needs to pay back the loan, on a monthly payment schedule, that usually begins 30 days after they arrive in Canada. There is an interest-free period of 12-36 months, depending on the size of the loan. The repayment rate for Refugee Transportation Loans is 91% despite the additional stress and hardship this loan places on refugee families.[3]

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[1] https://ccrweb.ca/en/myths-facts, http://www.clsrn.econ.ubc.ca/workingpapers/CLSRN%20Working%20Paper%20no.%20135%20-%20Zhang.pdf

[2] See https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2016377-eng.htm

[3] https://ccrweb.ca/en/refugees-social-assistance

REFUGEE CLAIMANTS

Refugee claimants are sometimes called "asylum seekers." They have chosen to flee their home country for similar reasons as refugees but instead of coming through formal government channels, they make their way to Canada independently and then make a refugee claim once they are in the country. They have very precarious status until their claim is heard and accepted or denied. If the claim is denied, then deportation proceedings begin. Acceptance rate of refugee claims was around 70% in 2017 – the highest it has been since 1991; however, it has been recently reported that the backlog of refugee claimant hearings is in the tens of thousands.[4]

Despite the additional challenges that refugees and refugee claimants face, they show great resilience, find successful settlement trajectories, and make positive contributions to Canadian society.

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS, INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, AND UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program enables employers to bring in temporary workers from abroad in situations where it is assessed that not enough Canadian labour is available to fill labour market vacancies. This program includes temporary in-home caregivers and temporary foreign agricultural workers, as well as skilled foreign academics and other "high-skilled" or "low-skilled" workers. At the height of the program in the mid-2010s, Canada was bringing in around 250,000 TFWs every year which was equivalent to the number of people coming to Canada as refugees and immigrants. Although TFWs are often brought in for jobs that have permanent labour force needs, they are restricted to only work for the employer who recruited them and have limits on how long they can remain in Canada. The program is also prone to abuse; for example, it included government regulations that allowed 'low-skilled' TFWs to be paid 15% less than Canadians for the same job and this was only changed to wage parity after it was reported to Canadians widely in the media, creating an outcry for change.[5] TFWs work, live, and play in the neighbourhoods we are a part of but do not receive government funding for

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[4] https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims.html

[5] See http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/volume19/pdfs/02_foster_press.pdf, p. 25 and https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/temporary-foreign-workers-everything-you-need-to-know/article18363279/

services due to their temporary status. For example, they may want to use the local recreation centre but the municipality does not receive any additional funds for TFWs within their population.

In the last decade, Canadian post-secondary institutions have increased their international student recruitment. In 2016, there were 524,000 long-term and short-term international students in Canada.[6] International students may come with their families and have needs for early learning and care. However, similar to TFWs, they have restrictions on how many hours they can work and what services they are eligible for. It also puts a strain on municipalities and other levels of government when international students need or want to access services for which no funding is available because they are not considered to be residents or citizens.

There are also communities of undocumented people in Edmonton – persons who may have come to Canada on a temporary visa (such as a visitor's visa) but remained in the country. It is known in the community that there are many families who are undocumented but still work in the community and have no immigration or citizenship status. Undocumented families need services such as early learning and care but often will not access programs because they are worried about disclosing their status to any "formal" organization or system. In September 2018, Edmonton City Council passed a motion to adopt an "Access to Municipal Services Without Fear" policy for residents with precarious or undocumented status.[7]

EMERGING COMMUNITIES

For the objectives of this report, and the purpose of the Council, it may also be helpful to identify a subset of newcomer communities. E*merging communities* are newcomer communities to Edmonton that are newly arrived, small in number, and have all or a combination of the following characteristics:

- have had a significant increase in numbers over the last 5 years;
- lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources (relative to more established communities);
- are more vulnerable than established communities as they are often from a refugee; background and have experienced displacement due to civil unrest;
- have individual members with low levels of education and skill due to displacement;

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[6] https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/sec-3.aspx?lang=eng

[7] https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PoliciesDirectives/C606.pdf

https://sanctuarycityyeg.wordpress.com/

- have individual members who do not have English language skills;
- have individual members who are unfamiliar with mainstream government services and less likely to be able to locate services that can help them meet their basic needs; and
- tend to not have a community infrastructure and organizations that can attract funding.

The *emerging communities* definition may be important to consider in moving forward with the Council's purpose where there is an "emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families." Newcomer families from emerging communities would meet the definition for vulnerability.

Note: MFRS is currently conducting a research project on behalf of the Edmonton Community Foundation that identifies factors that produce vulnerability/marginalization for refugee communities. Results from this study should be available in August/September 2019.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF A "CENTRALIZED SYSTEM OF EARLY LEARNING AND CARE?"

The ECELC has identified the following elements for an integrated, centralized system of early learning and care:

- is publicly managed
- is supported by public funding
- has a workforce that is appropriately educated and well-supported
- coordinates the range of services needed to support young children and their families, and
- contributes to eliminating poverty.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY?

These terms are often used interchangeably but it is important to define them for the purpose of this consultation report in order to clarify their usage in the following sections.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is the range of human difference, experiences, and perspectives. Although there is a tendency to see diversity as only visible diversity (e.g. range of skin colour), every group has considerable diversity within it when one thinks of educational background, family composition, income, and other elements. Diversity itself is simply a state of being (e.g. "this neighbourhood is diverse"). Increasing diversity does not necessarily mean that people are learning through that diversity and leveraging diverse perspectives to change policies, practices, or systems.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is valuing diversity and working to ensure there is the active participation of diverse people in an authentic way. Inclusion looks like and feels like true belonging and integration (not assimilation) into systems, programs, practices, and policies. Inclusion should lead to different ways of "doing business."

EQUITY

Equity is often conflated with equality, however, they are very different strategies. Equality strategies look at giving each person the same amount of something or the exact same service (e.g. every family gets exactly $500 as a child tax benefit regardless of income; or every child only receives 50 hours of language instruction regardless of their starting point). Equity strategies are about 'levelling the playing field' and examining the root causes of inequality. It involves removing systemic barriers (that often create intergenerational cycles of family struggle) and ensuring each family can access what they need in terms of opportunities, networks, resources, and supports – based on their own articulation of what they hope to achieve. Equity strategies should lead to social justice, which means an increase in fairness and equal outcomes for all groups regardless of their histories and social identities. If policies, practices, and systems are revamped through an equity lens, then we should expect a transformation of organizational features such as evaluation, needs assessments, human resources, compensation, etc. Implementing equity strategies within organizations may feel like radical change and often necessitates considerations of careful change management.

WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL?

"It [intercultural] means living together with a respectful awareness of each other's differences. We do this by examining ourselves, building relationships, and distributing power fairly."[8]

Many frameworks distinguish intercultural from multicultural or cross-cultural. *Multicultural* is conceptualized in this document as having a variety of cultures present but not necessarily learning from different cultures or engaging in a meaningful way. *Cross-cultural* practice means there is communication across cultures but the examination of histories of privilege and the sharing of resources to promote equity is not realized. *Intercultural* involves a deep level of engagement where communities are willing to be transformed by their interactions in order to ensure that the current and future generations have what they need to seek justice, define fairness, and experience success.

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[8] https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/vision-becoming-intercultural-church

WHAT IS CULTURAL BROKERING?

Cultural brokering involves bridging, linking and/or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change.[9] Cultural brokers are liaisons, cultural guides, mediators, and catalysts for change. Cultural brokers have trust and respect of the community; knowledge of values, beliefs, and practices of cultural groups; understanding of traditional and indigenous wellness and healing networks in diverse communities; and experience in navigating formal delivery and support systems. The principles of a cultural brokering approach are that communities determine their own needs, are full partners in decision-making, should economically benefit from collaboration and should benefit from the transfer of knowledge and skills.[10] This definition is offered in detail as many of the participants in this consultation describe a cultural brokering approach to their practice.

OVERALL GOAL FOR ECELC NEWCOMER CONSULTATIONS

To integrate knowledge and wisdom from newcomers, newcomer-serving organizations, and other key informants into the Council's work in a meaningful way; that is, to use this information to ultimately contribute toward achieving the ECELC's purpose.

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[9] Jezewski, M. (1990). Culture brokering in migrant farmworker health care. Western Journal of Nursing Research 12(4), 497-513.

[10] See National Centre for Cultural Competence (2004). *Bridging the Cultural Divide in Health Care Settings: The Essential Role of Cultural Broker Programs*.
https://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/Cultural_Broker_Guide_English.pdf

OBJECTIVES FOR ECELC NEWCOMER CONSULTATIONS

After discussions with Jeff Bisanz, Councillor Bev Esslinger (ELCSC Co-Chairs) and Heather Raymond (ELCSC/ECELC Coordinator), the following objectives were identified for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Newcomer Consultations

- Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) has greater insight into the realities, barriers, and opportunities for newcomer families when it comes to early learning and care.

- ECELC has identified opportunities for newcomer families, and those who work/are knowledgeable about the realities of newcomer families, to be involved in planning, advisory, and service delivery roles.

- to ensure ECELC's work aligns with its stated principles, such as,

    o *Individuals and* families *from diverse cultures must be engaged in advisory, planning, service delivery, and regulatory roles.* Dominant cultures inevitably influence the organization and delivery of services and can be a significant barrier to culturally diverse families and children.

    o *Special efforts are required to identify, engage, and respond to families who may be in need of and entitled to services but who, for whatever reason, are not accessing services.* Responsive supports are critical so that all children can be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.

    o *Supports must be adapted as necessary for the specific needs of children and their families*. As examples, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children and families have distinctive needs as a function of residential schooling, newcomer families have some characteristics that are specific to their ethnic communities, foster children have needs that arise from disruptive family histories, and children with disabilities often require services designed to accommodate their specific needs.

    o *Access to social, health, and educational systems must be equitable and timely*. These systems often are complex and unwelcoming. Barriers include language, culture, confidence, experience, discrimination, and inequitable levels of social and institutional capital and referent power that contribute to an imbalance of power. Although partners in early learning and care are working to reduce barriers, equitable and early access to early learning and care services often requires advocates, navigators, and/or companion workers who play an essential role in linking children and families to the supports they need to be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.

APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

The consultations involved meeting with key groups of people to learn about what is already known about this topic and to identify who some of the 'knowledge keepers' are on this topic. MFRS consulted with Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative; Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre; Intercultural Child and Family Centre; University of Alberta, Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP); MacEwan University, Human Services and Early Learning and Care; and Muslim Community of Edmonton (MCE) Child Care Centre to assess what work has already been done recently on the topic of newcomer families and early learning and care and to identify existing groups of practitioners and community members that would be good candidates for further consultation. The consultations also sought to identify facilitators for future conversations as community consultation often generates the richest data when the facilitators are known to participants and this would be an important aspect to future ECELC work.

The following methods were used in this consultation process:

Key Informant and Focus Group Interviews – the authors of this consultation report interviewed community brokers, community agencies, and academics/researchers in individual one-on-one and focus groups settings. A semi-structured interview guide was created with input from ECELC stakeholders (Appendix A). In total, we conducted:

- 1 focus group
- 2 interviews with research and academic institutions
- 3 interviews with community agencies

Respondents were given information on the purpose of the consultations and how their information will be used to inform the work of ECELC. Respondents were asked for consent to participate in the consultations and were informed that they would receive a copy of the final report.

Detailed notes were taken during both interviews and focus groups. For data analysis, the responses from the interviews were themed using content analysis and an inductive approach, where the units of analysis emerge out of the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection. QDA computer software was used to facilitate qualitative data analysis. Both authors of this report reviewed the findings and emerging themes to ensure consistency.

Document Review – the authors reviewed ECELC background materials to gain an understanding of the context for the consultations and how the data might be integrated into the vision, mission, principles, purpose, and responsibilities of the Council. They also reviewed any documents that were provided by key informants to identify themes related to newcomer families and early learning and care. See Appendix B for a list of documents reviewed.

This consultation was guided by a methodology/axiology grounded in community-based research and Indigenous research methodologies.[11] Countering the traditional emphasis of conducting "damage-centred research" on marginalized communities, the consultation methods sought a pathway of knowledge production through the query, "What can research really do to improve this situation?"[12]

Rather than consulting directly with newcomer communities that may have told their story of marginalization within early learning and care over and over again, without any meaningful change realized through that telling, this consultation gathered the knowledge that may be already well validated and community-known and seeks an action-orientation to "improve this situation."

It is hoped that relationships established through this consultation between ECELC and the community are to "be mutually beneficial, with an emphasis on the real, positive outcomes for communities in both the short and long term"[13] and has implications for partnership work in the future. The consultants' approach is that newcomer families should be viewed less as subjects of this consultation than a key part of its audience.[14] The shared responsibility that emerges from this work between ECELC, the key informants, and newcomer community members is to be learning partners in a "third space," working together to realize the recommendations and to guide the implementation of actions that work to mitigate and remove institutional and/or systemic disadvantage for newcomer families when it comes to centralizing early learning and care.

All participants of this consultation will be provided with a copy of the final report and it is suggested that ECELC encourages the distribution of this report widely. The implications of the findings and recommendations include areas for on-going dialogue and partnership with newcomer communities around early learning and care.

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[11] See Absolon, K. & Willett, C (2005); Magnat, V. (2014); Weber-Pillwax, C. (1999); and Wilson, S. (2001).

[12] See Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. Harvard Educational Review 79(3), 409-427.

[13] Ibid, p. 424.

[14] See Tallbear, K. (2013) *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 9.

The information from the consultations has been divided into three thematic areas (understanding newcomer realities, barriers, and keys to success). Quotes from interviews are italicized and provided as examples of statements that illustrated the thematic findings.

This consultation uses a qualitative approach that seeks to explore both the depth and breadth of responses provided. This report presents a synthesis of ideas presented by respondents including those ideas that may not have emerged consistently through all interviews but would still be valuable for ECELC consideration.

THEMATIC AREA #1: UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER REALITIES THAT AFFECT ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND LEADERSHIP OF NEWCOMER FAMILIES WITHIN EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

All respondents were asked to describe the newcomer populations that they work with in early learning and care. The following sub-themes emerged as important to consider when grounding our work on the lived realities of newcomer families.

LANGUAGE

As mentioned above, refugee families usually do not speak English nor French when they come to Canada. Respondents mentioned that both parents from refugee families have a need to be in English classes (unlike immigrant families where at least one parent would have had to qualify with their language skills to be accepted into Canada) and there are many areas of Edmonton with wait lists. Children also require care while their parents are in language classes. Child care is provided by most LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada – the federally-funded program for language learning for immigrants and refugees) centres but not all families are comfortable with using child care when they are still unfamiliar with the city and the programs and services landscape.

Furthermore, the language barrier is a gap for parents wanting to access early learning and care services or other programs and services that could support their children. Brokering support is important in bridging this gap and getting families connected.

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

When thinking about newcomer families and early learning and care, there are many different realities for families when it comes to employment and education. Some parents are international students, others are looking for work, and some might be working multiple jobs. Many newcomers are also underemployed when they enter the Canadian labour market.

"Even when they [economic immigrants] get jobs, they don't get too much pay because they don't have the [Canadian] education. Even immigrants need affordable child care."

IMMIGRATION CATEGORIES

Respondents identified that there are different realities for families when it comes to being aware of and accessing early learning and care based on their immigration status. For example, Government-Assisted Refugees tend to be more connected to public programs and services whereas Privately-Sponsored Refugees tend to be limited by the networks that their private sponsorship group is connected to. Respondents also mentioned the burden of the Refugee Transportation Loan on families and the challenges of supporting families who have TFW or other types of status because they are all eligible or ineligible for different kinds of programs.

"Gaps between families that arrive here are different – some may have settled more easily… [it's] hard for some of the families because of the varying levels of service they can access."

"Through the settlement program, they only tell them that school starts at age five, so parents don't have the knowledge about early learning and care. There needs to be more knowledge in the settlement sector about early learning and care."

TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Each newcomer family comes with a unique pre-migration history and settlement experience in Canada and respondents described how these experiences affect mental health; for example, a fear of change for people who come from places of oppression and little choice, such as life under dictatorships; the manifestation of depression and family violence issues that can arise from unaddressed pre-migration trauma (such as exposure to war with mass killings, sexual violence, etc.), compounded with the stress of poverty and other factors in the Canadian settlement experience; and emotionally supporting families in early learning and care spaces when family members overseas are killed or in danger. These are some of the "deeper" layers to the newcomer experience that affect their access, participation, and leadership roles within early learning and care.

"It's trauma to survive in Canada. It's stressful for the whole family. Men don't get jobs… Same issues seen for both immigrants and refugees… [they] are leaving their communities and families behind."

"Pre-migration trauma – there have been nine suicides as of late in this community, both youth and adults. Expectations when people come to Canada are not in line with their reality/experience."

BASIC NEEDS

Many respondents described newcomer realities where families struggle with food, rent, transportation, and other basic needs. Brokers who work with some of the most vulnerable/marginalized newcomers described the effects of poverty and the challenges of helping people navigate the system to get the services they need. However, the struggle to cover basic costs is a reality for *many* immigrant and refugee families; for example, many families use their Child Tax Benefit cheques to pay for food and shelter rather than using the money for programs, resources, and services specifically for children.

"Most challenges here are poverty … Struggling financially with housing – these are common struggles they have."

"I was working with a family whose son was eligible for pre-Kindergarten screening. I was telling them that they can take their child to any school, but they said they are too busy and no one could take [the child]. The parents work multiple jobs and might not know where to go."

"[We] need better access to information and support for all families to move towards eliminating poverty – [the] system needs to be better coordinated."

Furthermore, early learning and care agencies described the unfunded/out-of-scope work they do to support newcomers with basic needs, such as connecting clients to the Food Bank (and sometimes driving them there), trying to find clothing donations, and helping newcomers to find employment.

"I use my gas, I use my car, I use my time. Bring food, winter clothing, boots. Staff give rides to go here and there [because very new newcomers don't have cars]. On weekends, we try to set barriers so staff have family time. But sometimes there are still critical needs"

"[We see requests for] everything from basic needs to things that are out of scope for the organization – people who are looking to bring family members to Canada, parenting-related issues, employment…"

INTERSECTIONALITY AND NEWCOMER IDENTITIES

Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes people are made up of multiple social identities and that we must look at individuals, families, and communities both holistically and individually, to understand their perspectives, experiences, challenges, strengths, and to identify how we might work together. Although respondents did not use the term "intersectionality" they described many other layers of social identity that intersect with the newcomer identity to create unique circumstances for families seeking access, participation, and leadership roles in early learning and care; for example

- Ability/Disability
  - Newcomer families with children with disabilities face greater barriers when accessing or participating in early learning and care.

"If children have disabilities and [they have] another sibling, they might not be able to access daycare because they don't have specialized services for the child that has a disability, so both children are not able to attend."

- Family composition
  - Large families with many young children pose "problems" for systems that are set-up for one or two siblings to attend early learning and care programming or services.
  - There are grandparents caring for young children in newcomer families but they can be 'unacknowledged' as caregivers by programs and services.

"[In our community] most clients are refugees and most have large families – most are young parents and some of them came with children with disabilities."

"Dayhome was difficult to set up in the Somali community because of ratio – if the family already has many children, they might already hit the ratio."

- Pre-migration histories – layered with racialization and other factors
  - Newcomer children with 'behavioural' issues and their families feel stigmatized by child care workers, parents, and other children for displaying 'improper' behaviour [sometimes the determination of improper behaviour has racial overtones; for example, boys from Middle Eastern or African backgrounds are labelled as 'violent' if they are roughhousing or play fighting].
  - When newcomer children display behaviours of being 'shy' they are more likely to be labelled as having delays [because of stereotypes that non-English-speaking or non-White immigrants are more likely to be less intelligent, delayed, etc.].
  - There is often broad misconceptions about the premigration histories of families and how that affects families and the individuals within them. Much of the information about home countries and the nature of conflicts or the reality of social systems, economic factors, and justice systems is unknown to Canadians or they have a limited

understanding based on media reports. For example, the visual images of the Middle East common in Canadian media is that all people from the Middle East come from desert environments with meagre housing and conflict all around them rather than from bustling metropolises with white sand beaches and large modern houses that often included cooks, cleaners, and drivers -- which can be the reality for many middle-class or upper-class families. These 'lenses' on the world creates biases and stereotypes that affect how workers in early learning and care and others interact with newcomer families – and how others decide what kind of system would meet newcomer needs.

- Gender and gender roles
  - o Gender roles can shift in Canada. Sometimes the male partner becomes responsible for doing everything related to the children and the female partner has to be with her spouse/partner to accomplish tasks. In these situations, women/mothers may therefore be less connected to early learning and care spaces and less likely to actively participate. However, the opposite can also be true – sometimes women participate more actively in family decision-making around topics that would not have traditionally been within their domain or sphere of influence back home when they come to Canada and men feel like they are losing power. In either case, there is usually some level of renegotiation of gender roles when families come to Canada and this influences how we may see the participation or leadership of 'moms' and 'dads' when it comes to early learning and care.

- Sexual and gender minorities
  - o There are LGBTQ+ newcomer families who access or would like to access early learning and care but the system knows very little about these families and there is very little dialogue in the sector around LGBTQ identities.

"LGBTQ parents… has been an amazing eye-opener [for our Centre] – they're accessing services where they feel accepted and can see themselves – literature and services are available to them [here]."

- Housing status
  - o Living in government-subsidized housing is a barrier for newcomer families who might want to start a day home as this does not meet the criteria for licensing.

Many respondents mentioned that there are many "funds of knowledge"[15] that newcomers bring with the potential to strengthen early learning and care. Their contributions can go beyond "sharing ethnoculture" such as dress, diet, and dialect, to sharing wisdom and rich perspectives when it comes to board development, curriculum, and pedagogy. The respondents who used an inclusive approach when it comes to integrating newcomer knowledge, experiences, and perspectives, mentioned that this approach has brought benefits to the early learning and care space. They also cautioned that this approach to newcomer inclusivity must be authentic and come from a place of true partnership – where the childcare space is willing to be transformed by the diversity within it rather than using an "add-on" or tokenistic approach of bringing in newcomer knowledge. It is not about newcomer children and their families seeing the "right" images of themselves but of feeling like there is a sense of identity and citizenship for them within early learning and care.

"When a child comes into a Centre, it's their first mirror of society. 'Who am I?' and 'Do I belong?'

"[Newcomer families are] rich with cultural knowledge that can be beautifully interwoven into the pedagogy and curriculum"

"Don't pressure families to bring things from their culture to learn – make sure families are comfortable to do this and share. We try to invite personalization and culture but sometimes families want their children to experience Western culture. It's important to know that families are different [and to start where they are at]."

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECELC: UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER REALITIES

In the absence of detailed information, we all work from assumptions about who the user is, what he or she does, and what type of system would meet his or her needs. Following these assumptions, we tend to design for ourselves, not for other people." – The Human Factor: Designing Computer Systems for People by Richard Rubinstein and Harry Hersh

Newcomer families are very diverse and even within a category such as "immigrant" there is much heterogeneity. ECELC can benefit from engaging a multiplicity of newcomers and those who work closely with newcomers. In addition, it cannot be assumed that one member of a community (e.g.

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[15] For an explanation of funds of knowledge, see Gonzalez, N., Moll, L.C., & Amanti, C. (Eds). (2005) *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. [The definition offered on pp. ix-x is funds of knowledge is the notion that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge."]

Congolese community or Karen community) speaks on behalf of that entire community; or that one newcomer-serving organization speaks on behalf of all newcomers. Community members provide insight but we need a comprehensive understanding to move forward in an informed way.

The authors of this report caution that inclusion (valuing a diversity of newcomer voices) does not need to lead to paralysis when it comes to building a system of early learning and care that is equitable and culturally-responsive. We would suggest that the key to community-responsive action is to identify patterns across groups that cause inequities (e.g. many newcomers from both immigrant and refugee communities are struggling with obtaining employment and meeting basic needs) and to work in solidarity to change that reality for newcomer families.

Some of the realities for newcomer families mirror the realities for other families in Edmonton when it comes to issues such as poverty or racialization and how that affects experiences of early learning and care. It would be important for ECELC then to frame these realities as a poverty issue rather than a *newcomer* poverty issue, again, to show that actions taken to eliminate the factors that produce this reality for newcomers are not being undertaken to support a "special interest group" but are being taken to help all families who face the same issues. Finding solutions to issues such as housing or bias in the intake and assessment process would help many families in Edmonton, with multiplier effects for those who are the most marginalized. This avoids the "Olympics of oppression" model and instead builds social movements with horizontal alliances.

Understanding newcomer realities also involves understanding the systems and institutions that are *supposed* to meet their needs and the systems and organizations that *actually* meet their needs. For example, learning about how early learning and care agencies or programs are attempting to support newcomers with basic needs provides insight into the hidden story within many organizations – that governments are not funding or finding adequate policy solutions for marginalized families and that the not-for-profit sector (invisibly) fills in the gaps. Respondents explained how early learning and care can complement settlement agencies and other social services/community agencies when they engage in activities such as helping newcomers with employment, language, mental health, housing, or food security – but then the question emerges – should early learning and care extend into this area of work?

THEMATIC AREA #2: BARRIERS TO ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND LEADERSHIP FOR NEWCOMER FAMILIES IN EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

The second thematic area explores the barriers within the current system of early learning and care in Edmonton for newcomer families when it comes to access, participation, and leadership. The following sub-themes emerged as key considerations for understanding and addressing barriers.

LACK OF GOVERNMENT/FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Respondents mentioned that there is not always enough government support for adequate wages, employee development, infrastructure development, and programming; but there is also a lack of funds for important organizational and early learning and care systemic functions such as evaluation of programs and services, regular monitoring, and research.

"I don't get any government funding – can't fix the playground, no office money. We need support from the Government of Alberta so we can survive and support."

"We need to ask questions about parent and child experiences to determine whether or not things are effective but we are told that there is no time and money to do this."

"In a parent fee-driven system the relationship with the child care centre is about paying fees."

WAIT LISTS

Respondents mentioned the issue of waitlists and how this is a barrier for newcomer families when it comes to employment, language learning, and their ability to invest in social, economic, and cultural integration activities versus survival activities (but did not go into depth about this issue during the consultations).

"Why do families have to put their names on ten different waitlists?"

"They are waiting two years for a child care space – and they cannot wait that long"

LACK OF AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

As mentioned above in the thematic section on newcomer realities, many families have challenges with financial stability and navigating new systems. Respondents who serve newcomer families shared that they have had to reduce fees to make services accessible or that many families are unable to access the Early Learning and Child Care Centres program at $25 per day because the system is difficult to navigate.

If families haven't filed their income taxes, then they cannot apply for subsidies. Newcomer families who are struggling to understand regulations and procedures due to language barriers and other factors will have the most challenges in accessing affordable child care when they are the ones who need it most critically.

LACK OF SECTOR COORDINATION

Respondents mentioned a number of different areas where the lack of sector coordination affects the experiences of newcomer families within early learning and care. There was a concern that distinctions and different standards (or application of standards) between for-profit and non-profit, corporate versus community-based, and day home versus child care, etc. creates a system where it is difficult for newcomer families to know what "high-quality care" actually looks like.

"[We] need a system that is community-based. There is a concern when we see child care chains and corporations that are province-wide. This takes away the responsiveness to the families that are in the program centres right now."

"Day homes and child care should come under the same umbrella. It's creating differences in the pay, learning, care perspectives – quality care."

Respondents also provided insight into the research/theory-to-practice gap. Much good work and development of best practices is being done in both the research and practice sides of the work but there is a lack of sharing where practitioners can "actually do something with it."

"There's no integration between RAISED and FLIGHT – there needs to be professional development."

"We do a lot of research – in partnership with the community and community organizations – and were able to gather a lot of information. But how do we take the information and do something with it?"

"The ELCC [Early Learning and Child Care Centres pilot project] has collected data but the Centre has not been provided with evidence we can use. It's on a government level (reported as a big lump sum). We would like to know the percentage – who and what were responsible for the vulnerable families and how did they find out about this information? What centres were involved in this study?"

Respondents also spoke about the burden on families when programs and services in early learning and care are not coordinated for various age groups or special needs groups within the sector and across other sectors (i.e. K-12 system). For example, families often have to access a day home for infant care and then child care for slightly older children while their school-aged children might go to out-of-school care. In addition, children with disabilities may have to access different programs than their siblings, and these programs are often disconnected, which is a barrier to holistic family-centred learning and care – each family member is seen as an individual rather than as part of a collective unit. Furthermore,

newcomer settlement workers are not always informed about the range of early learning and care programming. They may only share that school starts for five-year-olds and therefore newcomer families lack knowledge about what is available for them. In addition, many newcomer families are not even connected to services for newcomers and their first point of contact for early learning and care and other supports is at the public health centre, library, faith-based facility, or through an English teacher. Early learning and care programs end up liaising with many other services to provide some level of seamless support for families.

Rules and regulations within the sector were also seen as uncoordinated when it comes to meeting the needs of newcomer families. For example, when there is a regulation against co-sleeping, is that truly about safety or is it a cultural assumption about safety that then gets applied to every situation?

"There's no real evaluation about what's important to parents or even engaging parents in general. For example, when there's a field trip to a child care centre, the parents are invited but they are not allowed to bring their other children – this is regulated and therefore there is no flexibility – but who is this regulation set up for? For safety? For the sake of having a policy? Let's make sure we have the basics down first… we need to make sure we look at everything (intersectionality) from the beginning."

GAPS IN WORKER QUALIFICATIONS

Respondents mentioned gaps for workers when it comes to a baseline understanding of early learning theory/practice, child development, and intercultural skills. For newcomer women who would like to work in the sector, there are barriers to understanding what is expected from a Canadian employer in addition to some of the knowledge gaps that are present across the sector. There is also a need to reflect on management qualifications and whether we are seeking managerial leadership or pedagogical leadership in early learning and care and what styles or competencies allow for equitable services that are flexible for different families and groups.

"What we've always had to advocate for is the idea that there is a specialized knowledge [which included cultural knowledge] but there has been a perception that any caring woman can do this job. We need to recognize that it takes a certain knowledge to do this work – looking after your own child versus looking after someone else's child [is not a directly transferable skill]."

LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY

As mentioned in the definitions section of this document, diversity, inclusion and equity are all different, yet related, concepts. Respondents mentioned many different areas of early learning and care practice that need to be examined through these lenses. For example, regarding participation and representation

in areas such as coalitions, consultations, curriculum review/development, and boards, participants mentioned that these activities are not representative of the communities they serve. Furthermore, many of the respondents are 'seasoned veterans' of the early learning and care field, but still experience being shut out of decision-making and experience roadblocks when trying to influence inclusion or equity practices within their organization or within the sector.

"There is no diversity at these tables.. Even when I get invited, I feel like I don't exist in these spaces."

"Communities that coalitions represented weren't representative of the communities they are meant to represent/support – are the right people around the table?"

"Challenge is the board. Families don't feel safe sitting at the board level. The board is all White."

"Those who are making decisions at a policy level do not reflect the very groups they're making policies and decisions about."

At a systems level, respondents were concerned about terms such as "publicly managed" within a centralized system of early learning and care. They wondered whether this term meant that the system is grounded in the community and that it would lead to control and choice for families who do not currently experience control nor choice within the system of early learning and care. Respondents also shared that there seems to be a top-down system for determining priority areas, such as the federal government currently focusing on Indigenous issues and disability issues without reflecting on how the learnings from these areas intersect with immigrant and refugee issues, etc. This sets up a feeling of competitiveness over priorities from one year to the next rather than building a process where knowledge is being produced to create better policies for all.

"Concern about integrated systems – watered down, one-size-fits-all – create a machine of a system instead of valuing diversity… families really deserve to choose."

"[I'm] tired of multicultural. We need intercultural – need to start asking questions that are uncomfortable."

At the practice level, brokers and facilitators who understand equity and intercultural practice are constantly having to mediate within early learning and care spaces that are set up for mainstream (White, middle class, heteronormative, etc.) understandings of child development and early learning. Without this mediation, parents who are already privileged would end up consolidating greater benefits, and children and families who are already marginalized would face greater marginalization due to assumptions about their motivation, knowledge, competence, etc.

"[Our] previous waitlist was an exclusive list – list of families that are in the know that understand the system and can plan three years in advance that was on that list. Families that have just arrived and are trying to make it to the next day, they weren't making it here. Now we consider the priorities."

"[There is an assumption] that we [liaisons/brokers/community workers] are not teaching children independence. Educators make [negative] comments about children's learning and ask brokers to talk to families about these issues. When we share that this is actually love [i.e. a different approach to early learning and support, not a problem behaviour] then educators seem to be okay with it."

"Educators sometimes assume that parents just don't know."

UNMET NEEDS FOR INTERCULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF NEWCOMER FAMILIES

One respondent succinctly summarized this sub-theme through the query, "are we co-constructing spaces of vitality" in early learning and care? Respondents described a gap in communication and the imposition of assumptions when it comes to understanding what families see as healthy and productive. Although there have been many studies and reports on the cultural validity of using various evaluation, assessment, and screening tools with immigrant and refugee families in an Edmonton/Canadian context,[16] practitioners and researchers reported that they must continue to assert that the early learning and care sector needs to engage children and families in a holistic way, to acknowledge that there are socio-cultural factors to assessments and what is seen as "good practice," and to build a curriculum that truly allows children and families to be authentic. Respondents indicated that parents are still not asked about what they want from programs – for example, do they want children to learn English or to be supported in their first language? And, furthermore, do families have guidance and access to quality information to base their decisions on? Frontline staff shared that many newcomer children are still labelled as "delayed" if they display different socio-cultural behaviours in early childhood domains such as feeding, dressing, and reading/oral language skills.

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[16] See Gokiert,R., Bisanz, J, Tews, L., Chiu, C. & Craig, M. (2008). Early childhood screening in immigrant and refugee families. Edmonton, AB: Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, retrieved from, https://cloudfront.ualberta.ca/-/media/ualberta/faculties-and-programs/centres-institutes/community-university-partnership/research/crossculturalhandbook.pdf; Tremblay, M. , Gokiert, R. , Georgis, R. , Edwards, K. , Skrypnek, B. (2013). Aboriginal perspectives on social-emotional competence in early childhood. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal,* 4(4); and Georgis, R., Gokiert, R. & Kirova, A. (2014-18). *Multicultural Early Childhood Assessment and Learning (MECAL),* https://www.ualberta.ca/faculties/centresinstitutes/community-university-partnership/research/early-childhood-development/mecaal

"[We] know that childhood development [assessments] are not universal, so [we] are trying to push back against that and say we don't need to measure kids this way – focus on what they know and what they can bring."

"Often first language is not recognized and children are labeled as delayed but it might actually just be an issue of different first language. Children are shocked to enter care – difference in culture, language, difference in feeding – culturally there's huge differences."

"The curriculum [Flight] says, 'be authentic.' But the system is telling them they can't… guidelines are strict when it comes to things like children eating from one plate or twins sleeping together."

COMMUNICATION GAPS WITH FAMILIES

Families have gaps in understanding the system of early learning and care and also have differing ideas about what happens in early learning and care spaces. For example, parents may know about day care but do not know about Head Start or family literacy programming. Parents may also think about early learning as academic learning ("seated at a table and desk, learning to write") rather than learning through play. Without good communication, newcomer parents are confused about the options and the choices they are making. Parents can also become fearful or distrustful when educators say their children need therapy or if they mention Children's Services involvement; these ideas are cultural and need to be shared with parents in an environment of trust and partnership. Furthermore, it is difficult for parents to take leadership roles in early learning and care (e.g. serving as board members) if no one has shared what that looks like and clarified what board roles and responsibilities are about.

"Many parents are not aware of childhood development and learning until sometimes it's too late to get them into these programs. [We] need to start talking about this when children are 0-3 – teaching parents to interact with their children beyond basic needs."

"Parents need to know they can take part in leadership roles and understand what those roles entail. The environment needs to be welcoming so that families feel included and feel like they can get involved."

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

Although mentioned infrequently, it is important to note that respondents indicated that families struggle with transportation to programs. Free bus tickets can be important as well having services housed together and therefore reducing the number of trips required.

BARRIERS TO WORKING IN THE SECTOR

For newcomers who wish to work in the sector, respondents mentioned that there are barriers such as language and accents which affect decisions around hiring and suitability as well as complications with work permits, low levels of compensation, and a lack of benefits. Some of the barriers are related to gaps in the sector overall.

"Educators are coming into a field that is hit-and-miss when it comes to wages and benefits – and if you don't have sick benefits, what do you do then? You can't bring your children to work sick – what If your children have a school holiday and you still need to work? Challenging for all workers, but especially difficult for newcomers."

"When you graduate from a two-year diploma and are looking for work – you may have a job in a 'business' that is very isolating. The work itself might be in a smaller program with possibly one other person as part of a team – might not have opportunities for professional learning."

"On the early learning side, many of the staff are women from our [newcomer] communities – it has been difficult for the women to get the education necessary to get to Level 2. There needs to be a bridging program to get them there – a program that included English and the child care curriculum."

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECELC: BARRIERS THAT NEWCOMERS FACE

There is a knowledge-to-action gap that runs through many of the sub-themes. The authors suggest that it might be less important to keep consulting with newcomers and newcomer-serving organizations (without specific actions identified) rather than looking at how meaningful change can occur (for example, what would it take to have the sector *implement* equitable early childhood assessments and evaluation?). Furthermore, many of the actions that would remove systemic barriers for newcomer families and workers would benefit all families and workers. This work then has the potential to produce a movement that is not about the needs of "special-interest groups" but is about the foundational needs for all workers and families – and it is clear that these actions can strengthen the fabric of Edmonton as a whole.

Further consultation directly with families may be needed to understand specific policy and practice areas but there are actionable items for ECELC to take based on the current knowledge around newcomer realities and the barriers that they face in early learning and care. The authors suggest that the scope of further consultations should focus on achieving concrete actions that make a measurable difference in the lives of families.

THEMATIC AREA #3: ENABLERS AND KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR BUILDING A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM OF EARLY LEARNING AND CARE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF NEWCOMER FAMILIES

This last thematic section focuses on the actions, policies, resources, and supports that would help to build a stronger centralized system of early learning and care for newcomer families. The sub-themes in this section are reported within a table that aligns barriers with the identified keys to success for overcoming those barriers.

Enablers and Keys to Success	Related barriers that may be addressed through these actions, policies, resources, or supports
### AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY Child care and early learning needs to be easily accessible, especially for families who face the most barriers when it comes to traveling and navigating programs and systems. Respondents suggested that increasing home visitation programs could also assist with meeting the needs of marginalized families.	Transportation barriers Lack of affordable child care Lack of sector coordination Lack of understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity
### SHARED SERVICES Respondents indicated that greater efficiency and effectiveness could be achieved by co-housing not-for-profits that play complementary/supportive functions for families accessing early learning and care and by creating 'hubs' where families can access everything they need (e.g. low-cost or free food, health services, language and employment training for adults, etc.) Newcomer families could also benefit from the co-housing of multiple early learning and care programs and services (from birth to out-of-school care). Respondents identified that this helps with connections with families, helps families to feel supported and empowered, and allows for an easier transition into school.	Transportation barriers Lack of sector coordination Lack of understanding diversity, inclusion, and equity Communication gaps with families

CENTRALIZATION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CARE SERVICES AND PROGRAMS	Lack of government/financial support
Some respondents advised that it would be useful to come together and "get rid of the distinction between profitable or not-profitable." They surmised that "if all workers came under the government then there could be better standards and pay overall."	Lack of sector coordination Gaps in worker qualifications Barriers to working in the sector

USING AN INCLUSION/EQUITY LENS FOR CHILD/FAMILY-CENTRED PRACTICE

"The child walks through the door with their values"

All respondents shared that early learning and care services and programs need to consider a bottom-up approach in its work.

This looks like having the time, space, and resources to truly engage families and using a relational approach. For example, slowing down the intake process where the family comes and brings whoever they want to the conversation. *"Educators start a conversation but need to be thoughtful and intentional so they don't take power away from families – we want to make it comfortable for families."*

It also means involving cultural brokers who can bridge systems and families – this helps families to feel included and sets them up to succeed from the beginning. Cultural brokers have intracultural knowledge as well as intercultural knowledge. They can speak the language of families as well as systems; they have a deep understanding of pre-migration histories; and they can help to uncover the rich cultural knowledge that can "be beautifully woven into the pedagogy and curriculum."

"The Council [ECELC] needs to think going forward -- about inclusivity in ELC [early learning and care] and in general – how to conceptualize and think about it – integrate it in every area – which also needs to happen with EPE [EndPoverty Edmonton] in general – integrate an equity lens when looking at things."

Waitlists

Lack of affordable child care

Lack of sector coordination

Gaps in worker qualifications

Lack of understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity

Communication gaps with families

Barriers to working in the sector

### EQUITABLE NEWCOMER REPRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION For respondents, this promising practice meant going beyond tokenistic/check-box approaches and enabling the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of newcomers to transform board relations and processes, to inform curriculum, and to change or create new policies. *"Board meetings will go quicker [with newcomer representation]. There will be less questions and trying to relate to newcomer experiences and more answers and solutions."* There is potential in involving parents to solve cultural barriers or differences through using a relational/brokering approach and to build better programs and services by checking in with families through an informal process of continuous consultation. This also involves asking why newcomers are not coming to the table – *"perhaps they don't want to participate in the way that they are wanted to participate. That's why we always see the same people at the table."*	Lack of sector coordination Gaps in worker qualifications Lack of understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity Communication gaps with families Barriers to working in the sector
### TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION It was briefly mentioned that new forms of communication such as WeChat are enablers to real-time communication with families.	Communication gaps with families

	Lack of sector coordination
ACCOUNTABILITY A few respondents indicated that more resources need to be invested in evaluation of early learning and care programs and services. It is not 'good enough' to *try* to be inclusive or equitable – *"organizations need to show successes in working with these families."*	Lack of understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECELC: ENABLERS AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

As ECELC works to build a centralized system, it must be cautious not to conflate centralization with top-down standardization. Newcomer families and those who serve them in early learning and care spaces need flexibility to be creative and responsive. In practice, this means not being averse to allowing different methods for intake, facilitation, etc. as long as outcomes are measured against a set of principles and values for inclusive and equitable early learning and care.

ECELC must also be a model of how to engage newcomer families and agencies in an authentic way, using a partnership approach. An outcome of this strategy would be that ECELC is transformed through this engagement and does 'business' differently as it increases its knowledge of inclusion and equity practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed in collaboration with ECELC members to ensure alignment with the purpose and goals of the Council and to consider resources, timing, and other factors in determining which recommendations inform the Council's priorities.

Although some recommendations may not be taken up as a priority for ECELC in its next 1-2 years of operation, our hope is that by sharing this report widely, other stakeholders will see opportunities to collaborate or to take on their own projects that will complement the work of ECELC and contribute to building equitable systems for all, including newcomer families. Two interconnections that we would like to specifically mention are those with EndPovertyEdmonton and Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (E-LIP).

ECELC members may also use the information and recommendations in this report to look at their own internal practices or systems. For example, does your organization have language-related barriers for newcomers? What can your organization do to take leadership/action on these issues so we are "walking the talk" as individual council members and as a collective body?

The authors also suggest reviewing the section on strengths of newcomer families (pages 24-25) for the context around recommendations on access, participation, and leadership of newcomer families in early learning and care. As emphasized earlier in this report, many of the recommendations have the potential to improve programming and services for *all* families even though they were generated in the newcomer context.

The recommendations have been organized around ECELC Common Goals (as defined in its current Terms of Reference).

ECELC Common Goals	Recommendation from Newcomer Consultations
Conducting research and analysis of community needs for early learning and care in Edmonton (including consideration of the types of services required, locations, and ages of children needing services) and evaluating services, especially in respect to eliminating poverty.	Conduct a cost-benefit analysis on a specific initiative (e.g. to make the case for creating hub models for service or to implement a bridging program for newcomer women to work in the early learning and care sector)
	Document the "invisible" work of the early learning and care sector (see pp.15-16 on early learning and care agencies supporting families with basic needs). Use this information to advocate for additional funding, partnerships (e.g. hub model, etc.), or to more adequately fund other agencies that can help with newcomer settlement and integration.
	Invest in evaluation of programming and services, especially when it comes to cultural responsiveness and equity. For example, are the concepts of equity within the Flight curriculum framework implemented into practice and can we measure an increase in positive outcomes for those who have been most marginalized in early learning and care (and other social systems)? Or, can we take a snapshot of what planning for child care/early learning looks like now for newcomer families and then compare that with data five years later?
	Create a profile of affordability of early learning and care with a breakdown of immigration status and lines of poverty/non-poverty. For example, temporary foreign workers do not get subsidies

ECELC Common Goals	Recommendation from Newcomer Consultations
	whether they are low-income or high-income. Use this profile to understand that if some subsidies were altered, it would have no effect on certain newcomer realities.
Developing new structures to enable affordable, high-quality early learning and care services.	Find ways to minimize language-related barriers for newcomer families (this could include actions that work to connect newcomer families with services, improve communication between child care workers and families or provide flexible child care supports for parents who need to take language classes). Projects and programs in this area could include integrating cultural brokering services, part-time employment of parents with language skills to help with interpretation, etc.)
	Develop a systems navigator for early learning and care programs and services.
	Engage newcomers and those who work with newcomers in the design and implementation of policies, regulations, and practices that will affect newcomer children and families.
Developing and supporting partnerships between local governments and community-based services to integrate early learning and care services, such as the creation of local "hub models" for service.	Map all the other agency/system interconnections with early learning and care programs and services.
	Develop a hub model for newcomer families accessing early learning and care
Designing and implementing strategies that build the capacity of community-based service providers and school boards to deliver high-quality early learning and care, including staff	Support the development and delivery of education for child care workers, early childhood educators, and others (perhaps even families) about newcomer realities (pre-migration history,

ECELC Common Goals	Recommendation from Newcomer Consultations
education and program delivery supports (such as designing guidelines for early learning and care spaces).	differing needs, cultural responsiveness, etc.) Build in an application-to-practice component so the education sessions result in changes that improve policies and practices for newcomer families
	Education for ECELC around diversity, inclusion, and equity so all stakeholders have a common understanding and know how these concepts might be applied in the Council's work as well as within individual agencies.
	Education for early learning and care sector on bias, intercultural practice, diversity, inclusion, equity.
Increasing quality of services by, for example, promoting goals and standards that exceed those established in regulation.	Implement culturally appropriate ways to assess newcomer children (build on the research and tools that already exist).
	Define intercultural competencies for the sector and create a competency framework based on roles (e.g. child care worker, director, etc.). Use competencies in job descriptions, hiring, orientation, and performance measurement.
	Improve coordination of early learning and care services for newcomer families and the sharing of information with newcomer families
Promoting culturally responsive early learning and care services, curricula, and training programs for service providers by engaging	Early learning and care programs and services are supported to develop a diversity/inclusion/equity policy which includes a procedure around the

ECELC Common Goals	Recommendation from Newcomer Consultations
educational institutions and service providers who work with Indigenous and newcomer families in Edmonton communities	evaluation of the policy by families, staff, board members, and partners.
	Develop job descriptions (not just job postings or advertisements) for board members and other leadership roles in early learning and care through an equity lens (i.e. using plain language, clearly sharing expectations and explaining what is required, etc.) Use new recruitment strategies to engage newcomers and other diverse board members.
	Engage newcomers and those who work with newcomers in design and implementation at the policy, regulation, and practice level of the "centralized" system. Ensure that the engagement is facilitated in a participatory manner; for example, meaningfully giving exposure to understanding the systems that exist and building capacity for those who have been traditionally marginalized in systems to develop their own thinking and ideas (i.e. inclusion not assimilation)
Building community support, including public education, for increased investments in early learning and care.	In developing solutions, seek to understand the systems that are supposed to be helping newcomers and those that are actually doing the work (incorporate a holistic/systems approach to support real, positive outcomes for newcomer communities in the short-term and long-term).
	Develop education for the settlement/newcomer-serving sector about early learning and care options.

NEXT STEPS

As mentioned in the recommendations section, the information from this report will be used by ECELC to guide its work but can also be used by others to improve early learning and care services for newcomer families.

BACKGROUND

Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (ELCSC) seeks to consult with newcomer communities in Edmonton, specifically in regard to planning a centralized system of early learning and care that honours the realities of marginalized families and works to mitigate and remove institutional and/or systemic disadvantage for these families.

This work will accomplish the following objectives:

- ELCSC has greater insight into the realities, barriers, and opportunities for newcomer families when it comes to early learning and care.

- ELCSC has identified opportunities for newcomer families, and those who work/are knowledgeable about the realities of newcomer families, to be involved in planning, advisory, and service delivery roles.

- to ensure ELCSC's work aligns with its stated principles, such as,

  - *Individuals and* families *from diverse cultures must be engaged in advisory, planning, service delivery, and regulatory roles.* Dominant cultures inevitably influence the organization and delivery of services and can be a significant barrier to culturally diverse families and children.
  - *Special efforts are required to identify, engage, and respond to families who may be in need of and entitled to services but who, for whatever reason, are not accessing services.* Responsive supports are critical so that all children can be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.
  - *Supports must be adapted as necessary for the specific needs of children and their families*. As examples, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children and families have distinctive needs as a function of residential schooling, newcomer families have some characteristics that are specific to their ethnic communities, foster children have needs that arise from disruptive family histories, and children with disabilities often require services designed to accommodate their specific needs.
  - *Access to social, health, and educational systems must be equitable and timely*. These systems often are complex and unwelcoming. Barriers include language, culture, confidence, experience, discrimination, and inequitable levels of social and institutional capital and referent power that contribute to an imbalance of power. Although partners in early learning and care are working to reduce barriers, equitable and early access to early learning and care services often requires advocates, navigators, and/or companion workers who play an essential role in linking children and families to the supports they need to be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.

Interview Questions

1. Describe the newcomer population that your organization works with.

2. What are the challenges newcomer families face when it comes to accessing early learning and care?

   2a. What are the challenges/solutions when it comes to newcomer families **accessing services**?

   2b. What are the challenges/solutions when it comes to newcomer families **participating in early learning and care, including when it comes to working in the sector**?

   2c. What are the challenges/solutions when it comes to newcomer families taking **leadership roles on issues related to early learning and care**?

3. What are the strengths newcomer families bring to early learning and care (access, participation, and leadership)? *What are some of the untapped opportunities in engaging newcomer families?*

4. What are some promising policies or practices that you recommend to ensure the future design of a centralized system truly meets the needs of newcomer families? *What should we aspire to in respect to early learning and care for newcomer families?*

[What do we (Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care) mean by a centralized system of early learning and care?

To design, advocate for, and build an integrated system of early learning and care that

- *is publicly managed,*

- *is supported by public funding,*

- *has a workforce that is appropriately educated and well supported,*

- *coordinates the range of services needed to support young children and their families, and*

- *contributes to eliminating poverty.*]

5. Are there any other documents/materials we should be aware of related to this topic?

6.   Who would you recommend be involved in further consultations to learn about early learning and care for newcomer families? [Think of newcomer families, organizations, brokers, and community leaders]

6a. Would any of these people be suitable to facilitate further conversations with community members? [Are they suitable 'insiders' to newcomer community groups and organizations?]

6b. Who would be suitable for policy, decision-making/governance and other roles?

APPENDIX B: LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (May 10, 2019), *Terms of Reference*

Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (September 17, 2018), *Early Learning and Care in Edmonton: Building Capacity for Local Management and Planning of Services*

Georgis, R., Gokiert, R. & Kirova, A. (2014-18). *Multicultural Early Childhood Assessment and Learning (MECAL),* https://www.ualberta.ca/faculties/centresinstitutes/community-university-partnership/research/early-childhood-development/mecaal

Georgis, R., Brosinsky, L., Mejia, T., Kirova, A., Gokiert, R., and Knowledge Exchange Advisory (2017). RAISED between Cultures: A Knowledge and Reflection Guidebook for Intercultural Practice in the Early Years. Edmonton, AB: Community-University Partnership, University of Alberta.

Gokiert,R., Bisanz, J, Tews, L., Chiu, C. & Craig, M. (2008). Early childhood screening in immigrant and refugee families. Edmonton, AB: Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, retrieved from, https://cloudfront.ualberta.ca/-/media/ualberta/faculties-and-programs/centres-institutes/community-university-partnership/research/crossculturalhandbook.pdf

Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Society (January 23, 2019), *Notes from I-WIN Presentation on Choosing Child Care*

Tremblay, M. , Gokiert, R. , Georgis, R. , Edwards, K. , Skrypnek, B. (2013). Aboriginal perspectives on social-emotional competence in early childhood. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal,* 4(4)