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**Chilliwack
Community Services**

"Bridge to Your Future"

Final Performance Report

May 31, 2004

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BRIDGE TO YOUR FUTURE PROJECT

1. **Project Title:**
Bridge to Your Future
2. **Reporting Organization**
Chilliwack Community Services
3. **Reporting Period Covered**
April 1 - May 31, 2004
4. **Project Description**
The Bridge to Your Future is a project to create a standardized, comprehensive and efficient process to assess the suitability and readiness of skilled immigrants to enter the work force.

Objectives	Outcomes	Indicators	Evaluation
<p><u>Objective 1:</u></p> <p>Create a new resource kit that supports the development of an integrated bridging system that successfully addresses barriers to labour attachment of skilled immigrants</p>	<p>Identification of clients' immediate priorities and the resources and services available to address those priorities</p> <p>More integrated and efficient service system</p> <p>Maximization of client success</p>	<p>Clients will demonstrate an increased understanding of the steps needed before entering the labour force</p> <p>Reductions of service gaps and inefficiencies</p> <p>Speedier integration of skilled immigrants into labour force</p>	<p>Client feedback Stakeholder survey</p>
	<p>Immigrants will gain the knowledge, self awareness and confidence necessary to enter the workforce</p> <p>Immigrants become more self reliant</p>	<p>Over time, immigrants will access a variety of programs and services within the community, and possibly outside the community, on the journey towards labour market attachment</p> <p>Immigrants are able to make decisions that increase their independent efforts to gain and maintain employment</p>	<p>Client feedback</p>

<u>Objective 2:</u> Contribute to the future development of labour market initiatives in BC	Development of accessible and portable tool kit with potential for provincial standardization	Quantitative results obtained from testing kit tools	Client interviews Stakeholder feedback Self report by client Client survey
	Project compatibility with EASI initiative	Immigrant and stakeholder response to test phase	Client interviews Stakeholder feedback Final performance report

5. Summary of Activities to date

Date	Activities
April 1	Meeting with Donna Lo - Canadian Centre. Dale Cuthbertson Chilliwack Community Services
April 1 - 30	Development of Employment Readiness Tool Kit - Web site Including Internet searching, format development, text development and email/phone inquiries
April 2	Consult with Mary Evans - prep for Focus Group
April 5	Predictor Focus Group - UCFV
April 6	Contacting service providers - Write up focus group notes, draft employer focus group invitation
April 7	Contact proponents - collaborate Consult with local service providers - Stephen Evans, Sukaina Rhemtulla, Carla Bullinger
April 8	Contact employers by phone - get contact names - send letters Consult with Dalbir Randhawa - settlement interviews
April 12	Draft format for Tool Kit
April 13	Internet research - for web links
April 14	Consultation with Dale/April - CCS. Meet with Wendy Watson - UCFV, arrange appointments, debrief interviews
April 15	Consult with web designer, internet searching, consult with associates
April 16	Consult with Karen Davies - ESL Liasion - International Education
April 18	Consult Debbie Denault - re:English self assessment matrix Consult - Taranjot, April.
April 19	Meeting with associates - prep for focus group
April 20	Arrange food/space for focus group. Consult with Dalbir Prep for proponent meeting
April 21	Proponent meeting - Vancouver
April 22	Employer Focus Group - CCS Debrief - consult with Mary/Taranjot Book computer space and emails to ESL Focus Group participants
April 23	UCFV Educators - Focus Group Skilled Immigrant (ESL - UCFV) Focus Group
April 24	Consult with Sue Brigden - Assessment Services, UCFV Consult with Lucy Fraser, Mary Evans - Research Assistance
April 25	Phone consultation - Adele LaRiviere - web design

April 26	Meeting with Adele LaRiviere - web designer
April 27	Attended Emerging Social Issues - United Way
April 29	Computer Focus Group - test tool kit document - UCFV ESL students - Chilliwack Campus
April 30	Meeting with Research Associates - gather data
May 1	Refine tool - scrutinize internet site resources
May 2	Research domain name/hosting web options
May 3	Consult with Wanda Gordon - Health Sciences - UCFV Meet with Adele LaRiviere - Web designer
May 4	Consult with April - CCS
May 5	Consult Kelly Pollack - MOSAIC - re:Looking Ahead web hosting Consult Adele LaRiviere/April with options
May 6	Refine tool - prep draft for focus group
May 7	Proof tool - send to service providers for feedback
May 12	Computer Focus Group - ESL Students UCFV-Abby Campus
May 14	Meet with Adele LaRiviere - web designer Phone consultation with Debbie Denault - English Matrix rationale
May 17	Revisions - incorporate Focus Group feedback into Tool Meet with Adele LaRiviere - web designer
May 18	Computer Focus Group - ESL - Abby Community Services Consult with Dale and April - CCS
May 19	Consult with Matthew Stevenson - Trades BC Start Final Report Arrange last Focus Group
May 20	Foreign Credentials :A New Perspective Conference
May 21	Update Tool with new information from conference
May 25	Write service provider guide section Respond to feedback - incorporate Meet with Sukaina - settlement worker feedback
May 26	Communicate with web designer, proof and revise service provider guide, proof tool - incorporate feedback from service providers
May 27	Final Report Preparation, Focus Group UCFV - Abbotsford
May 28	Finalize Tool Kit - send to Web Designer Print Hard Copy
May 29	Final Report - send to April for review
May 30	Complete Final Report
May 31	Consult Web Designer - Print Tool Kit Copies - send pdf and courier

6. Summary of Final Deliverables Achieved

The deliverables for the Final Report as outlined in the proposal include:

1) **Skilled Immigrant Worker Assessment Kit** - including Employment Readiness Assessment, Employment and Assistance Matrix and Passport to Work.

Over the course of the project, and with the ongoing input from both skilled immigrants and service providers, the three pieces of the Skilled Immigrant Worker Assessment Kit evolved into a comprehensive website, with a self assessment employment readiness matrix, and active links to self assessment and information sites for 6 of the key predictors of success. The web link is called - **Employment Readiness Assessment Tool Kit for Skilled Immigrants** and will be hosted on the Looking Ahead website in the near future. It is targeted to skilled immigrants before and after moving to BC and addresses the following predictors:

English Language proficiency
Labour Market Information
Credentials Recognition
Job Search Strategies
Community Resources
Canadian Culture

The purpose of the tool is to alert skilled immigrants considering immigrating or waiting for the immigration process to conclude, of the absolute necessity for preparation and research in successfully integrating into the workforce in BC. It will also be of great use to skilled immigrants already in BC, to assess their readiness for employment and take the necessary steps to be fully equipped to compete for positions in their field. It is also a useful tool for service providers to clearly identify the gaps in preparation, focus their support to areas of highest priority and reduce the amount of assessment required between service providers.

The **Employment and Assistance Program Matrix** is available in several forms on the internet, so instead of recreating this matrix, web links are included in the tool to direct immigrants to the specific area of assistance they need. Once immigrants are connected to a settlement worker, it appears that is the most effective way of linking them to local employment and assistance resources. Specific community information is given to immigrants as they land at the Vancouver Airport, which directs them to the settlement worker in their community.

The **Passport to Work** and the **Employment Readiness Matrix** became one and the same document through the evolution of this tool. It was suggested not to call the tool a passport, as this appeared to be very confusing for immigrants. The Employment Readiness Matrix provides a step by step way

of recording the immigrant's progress through the levels of readiness and therefore serves as a passport to work as it was originally conceived.

2) Final Report - enclosed

7. Summary of Emerging Issues Affecting the Original Work Plan

Issue - Focus Group Attendance

Lower than expected focus group attendance required a shift in method for gathering information and testing the tool kit. The following number of Focus Groups were held:

Skilled Immigrants	6 focus groups	Total attendance	35
Employers	1 focus group - Chilliwack	Total attendance	4
Educators	1 focus group	Total attendance	4
Total Focus Group Participants			43

Steps to address issue:

Skilled immigrants and other stakeholders were contacted individually and information was shared between other proponents to reduce duplication and over solicitation of stakeholders. Feedback was gained through individual interviews, phone conversations and email. Due to the size of the employment readiness tool kit in word document format and the time it takes to review, it was difficult to get a detailed response on the total document from stakeholders. So, specific sections of the tool were sent to the stakeholders with expertise in that area, and responses were incorporated into the tool. Several stakeholders and skilled immigrants spent a generous amount of time making detailed comments throughout the text. Much of their feedback has been incorporated into the final product.

Settlement client interviews	10
Employer interviews	2
Educator Interviews	5
Other stakeholder feedback	10 (email, phone)

Issue - English language proficiency/computer literacy required for tool kit use

Questions arose through the process, regarding the high level of English language proficiency and computer literacy required to use this tool effectively. The target group for this tool kit is skilled immigrants, who will need to have a high level of language skill and computer literacy to successfully navigate the job search process and secure work in their field here in BC. If they have trouble with this tool, it is highly likely they will have difficulty in other areas of their job search and integration into the skilled workforce. One stakeholder suggested skilled immigrants needed to

be aware of the expectations and not be "spoon fed", at this stage of their integration process.

Suggestions to address issue:

Feedback from both skilled immigrants and stakeholders confirmed the need to simplify the language only if the tool kit is to be used with other target groups. It was suggested that the initial home page be translated into other languages to make it easily accessible to immigrants in other countries, before they move. The importance of preparation is conveyed in the earliest parts of the document and may stimulate discussion and activities even if the rest of the document is not accessible due to low English language proficiency. Alternatively, the whole tool kit could be simplified or translated for use by those moving from the primary immigrating countries.

Settlement workers also can assist with the application of the tool kit in person, if a skilled immigrant is unable to use it independently. Settlement workers could also facilitate access to community computers for those immigrants who do not own computers or have internet access available to them.

Issue: Lack of verbal and listening English language assessment on internet

A key concern for many of the skilled immigrants interviewed, was the lack of opportunities to practice their English language listening and speaking in their own country before arriving in Canada. Many had exceptional reading and writing proficiency, however they were almost impossible to understand verbally due to their strong accents. There are few web sites that have audio assessment and practice, and some charged a fee or required a downloaded program. This may not be feasible for many immigrants who do not have up to date computer capabilities.

Suggestions to address issue:

Since fluency in spoken English appears to be a primary requirement for successfully integrating into the workforce in Canada, the development of an interactive English language practice site would be very valuable for immigrants before they leave their country.

Another suggestion from a focus group was the need for an international chat room for skilled immigrants, to share experiences, stories and advice between those who have landed and those who are preparing to immigrate.

Another suggestion offered by a focus group participant, that would address both the English listening skill issue and the immigrant story issue, would be the use of short video clips on the internet. Each clip could describe a different problem area and how to go about dealing with it. Video clips could also be a way of capturing immigrant experiences and advice in "What immigrants say...." clips.

Issue: Lack of expertise in skilled immigrant employment issues among service providers in smaller communities

Skilled immigrants overwhelmingly agreed that there was a gap in terms of knowledgeable employment support for skilled immigrants from existing community resources, at least in the Chilliwack area. Several talked about being referred from one agency to another, completing several employment-related workshops and still experiencing no concrete or useful help. The settlement worker in Chilliwack, who is only part time, agreed that she did not have the time or training to give appropriate support in this area. The manager of the local employment assistance service stated that when skilled immigrants are referred to other agencies (such as Credentialing Organizations) they seldom return - quite possibly lost in the system and not aware they can still look for work without approval of their credentials.

The key person in the community, whose name was mentioned again and again as a vital resource for skilled immigrants was Dorine Garibay. Dorine is an ESL instructor at the University College of the Fraser Valley and a member of the EASI Leadership Council. She has up to date knowledge of the systems at play in this issue and was consistently able to connect immigrants to the information and people that could finally make a difference for them, often after months or years of seeking the right resource. Many of them talked about Dorine as a "lifeline" in their journey.

It is also apparent that information regarding skilled immigrant issues is changing almost hourly. All service providers need access to current information and ongoing training to assist them to in turn effectively assist skilled immigrants.

Suggestions to address issue:

Specialized training needs to be available for either settlement workers or employment counselors so they are equipped to provide employment support services to skilled immigrants, especially in professional occupations. Both time and resources need to be allocated so service providers; can offer effective employment support services, stay up to date with federal, provincial and local changes that affect skilled immigrants, and facilitate connections between skilled immigrants and the systems that affect their employment success. There are trades employment centres in several locations in the province, but specialized services for professionals are limited. Service providers from smaller communities could also be paired with experienced immigrant employment counselors from larger centres, to access assistance and information when needed.

Another key issue skilled immigrants emphasized was the vital importance of developing relationships between unemployed skilled immigrants and employed professionals in the same field. Facilitated opportunities for these two groups to meet would significantly increase the skilled immigrant professional's ability to develop networks, market themselves and correct inaccurate perceptions.

8. Summary of Adjustments to the Anticipated Project Outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes	Indicators	Summary of Adjustments
<p><u>Objective 1:</u></p> <p>Create a new resource kit that supports the development of an integrated bridging system that successfully addresses barriers to labour attachment of skilled immigrants</p>	<p>Identification of clients' immediate priorities and the resources and services available to address those priorities</p> <p>More integrated and efficient service system</p> <p>Maximization of client success</p>	<p>Clients will demonstrate and increased understanding of the steps needed before entering the labour force</p> <p>Reductions of service gaps and inefficiencies</p> <p>Speedier integration of skilled immigrants into labour force</p>	<p>Focus group and interview comments confirmed an increased understanding of the steps needed to successfully prepare for a job search in BC. Comments like "if I had known this before I came to Canada...." were common.</p> <p>Settlement workers and skilled immigrants alike could clearly identify the immediate priorities in all six areas of preparation by using the matrix, and promptly link these areas of need to local resources on the web and further to local resources in the community. This effectively reduces many of the gaps in information a skilled immigrant experience.</p> <p>This tool provides a common foundation for both for skilled immigrants to communicate their employment readiness to service providers and for service providers to communicate amongst each other.</p> <p>Until the tool kit is used with skilled immigrants and between service providers over time, reduction in gaps of service and inefficiencies cannot be measured.</p> <p>Client feedback confirmed the usefulness of tool information and the decreased time required to find information on the internet and within internet sites as a result of the step by step "click" instructions.</p> <p>Until the tool has been used for a period of time and the integration of skilled immigrants into the workforce is tracked, it is not possible to speculate about the speed of integration as a result of this project.</p>

			It is also apparent systems need to adjust to accommodate a speedier integration of skilled immigrants
<p><u>Objective 2:</u></p> <p>Contribute to the future development of labour market initiatives in BC</p>	<p>Development of accessible and portable tool kit with potential for provincial standardization</p> <p>Project compatibility with EASI initiative</p>	<p>Quantitative results obtained from testing kit tools</p> <p>Immigrant and stakeholder response to test phase</p>	<p>A total of 70 participants contributed to the development and testing of the tool kit. The kit will be accessible online (in the near future) and is also accessible in hard copy format. It has been developed with a provincial focus, as the initial scope of just the Fraser Valley would have produced a tool with very limited utility for the vast majority of skilled immigrants who tend to settle in larger centres.</p> <p>Feedback was received in verbal, written and email form. Data was also gathered in the form of observation notes, taken during computer focus groups sessions with skilled immigrants. This data has all been synthesized and used to formulate then revise the tool kit over course of the project.</p> <p>The tool kit has been developed as a word document and can therefore be easily accessed for downloading and easily accessed via a computer with basic software capabilities.</p> <p>The project appear to be compatible with the EASI initiative and the tool kit is expected to be hosted on the Looking Ahead web site in the near future. The tool kit can be easily edited, added to and modified to support the EASI initiative.</p> <p>Immigrant and stakeholder response to the tool kit has been very positive and any constructive feedback has been used to modify and improve the original draft of the tool.</p> <p>The testing of the tool kit was all done in word document format in computer labs. Once the tool kit is available online, more accurate testing of online usefulness could be undertaken.</p>

Additional Comments

1) The need for this kind of assessment and information tool has been confirmed by our research as well as comments made at other gatherings outside the direct scope of this project. (e.g. Foreign Credentials: A New Perspective Conference). This project has produced a concrete, practical and action oriented tool, which needs to be introduced to the community as soon as possible through:

- a) implementation of the web link on the Looking Ahead site as proposed in this report
- b) provision of orientation sessions for stakeholders
- c) distribution of hard copy kits to immigrant serving agencies
- d) publication of its availability in targeted media forums (e.g. The Canadian Immigrant newspaper)

It is the intention of Chilliwack Community Services to provide an orientation to local stakeholders to the Employment Readiness Assessment Tool in the near future. As originally proposed stakeholders would include:

Employment Assistance Agencies

Ministry of Human Resources

University College of the Fraser Valley

Settlement Workers

The more quickly this orientation can be undertaken, the more quickly service providers can utilize this tool in their day to day support of skilled immigrants.

2) Although this project was directed to skilled immigrants, there is also a need for similar employment information for other immigrant groups who may possess a lower English proficiency. This tool kit could be easily modified to address the employment needs of other immigrant groups as well.

3) Responsibility for updating the web link with current information needs to be determined and delegated promptly.