

**ENHANCING LABOUR MARKET ATTACHMENT
OF SKILLED IMMIGRANTS WITHIN THE
OKANAGAN: AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**

Final Report

MCAWS Contract #: **CO04IQP017EXP**

Submitted by: **POSSIBILITY CONCEPTS**

Assunta Rosal, B.A., B.S.W.
11651 McGowan Rd.,
Lake Country, B.C. V4V 1J2
(250) 766-2617 Cell: (250) 878-5517
E-mail: assunta@cablelan.net

May 31, 2004

Possibility Concepts undertook a process to review the Career Assessment & Planning Services in the Okanagan to determine if Skilled Immigrants can access a) appropriate assessment services, b) employment-related information and referrals, c) assistance to develop individualized action-planning process. Further, the review included determining if there were any Integrated Bridging Services in the Okanagan region and to access the capacity of Integrated Bridging Systems. Finally, in each of the three cities of the Okanagan, an Advisory Committee was struck to review the data gathered, to conceptualize tools that would assist the Services to respond to the needs of Skilled Immigrants and finally to identify strategic opportunities and priorities for service delivery.

The first task, [review existing Career Assessment & Planning Services within the Okanagan region to determine if skilled immigrants can \(1\) access appropriate assessment processes; \(2\) access employment-related information and referral services; \(3\) are assisted to develop individualized action-planning process](#) and the second task, [to identify if there are any Integrated Bridging Services in the Okanagan Region was completed in March and early April.](#)

During this project **Possibility Concepts** met with and interviewed more than 44 Agencies and Services. Four of the agencies provide either Settlement or ELSA and are funded by the Ministry of Community Aboriginal and Women's Services (MCAWS). There was one educational institute, OUC and several agencies that represent employers. There were sixteen agencies providing direct Career Assessment and Planning Services within the Okanagan Region. While, it became evident that Skilled Immigrants can access Career Assessment and Planning Services in the Okanagan, those services are not able to meet the unique needs of Skilled Immigrants. The assessments are not always appropriate to their needs; it does not include support to complete the credential evaluation process. In fact, some agencies that were HRSD funded did not know that they could apply for funding support from HRSD to support this process. Skilled Immigrants can access employment-related information and referrals as long as language is not a barrier and they understand the nuances of Canadian employment cultural norms.

Skilled Immigrants are not tracked as a “target” group. Some agencies estimated that Skilled Immigrants represented 5% of their caseload while others estimated that Skilled Immigrants represented 25% of their caseload. It seemed like there was a correlation between the percentage of Skilled Immigrants served and the skills of the Service providers. In other words, if an Employment Counselor had previous training working with Skilled Immigrants then their caseloads were higher. This seemed to be the result of referrals. For instance, in Kelowna, Elizabeth McLeod, a Settlement worker, makes referrals to Speaking Out Services, especially if the Skilled Immigrant is looking for work in the trades. The clients, Ms. McCleod has worked with have been very satisfied with the services of Speaking Out and so Ms. McCleod continues to make referrals to this particular agency. At this agency, there is one worker in particular who receives the majority of Skilled Immigrant client referrals because her colleagues know that she is more able to provide specialized services. This employment counselor used to work with Skilled Immigrants on the coast.

There was one specialized service that was specifically designed to assist Skilled Immigrants, it was funded through HRSD and provided for the past eight years through the Vernon & District Immigrant Services Society. VDISS has pioneered this service and identified some problems. HRSD requires that the individualized plan be completed in three months and this is unrealistic given that it can take more than a year to complete the Credential Evaluation process. In addition, clients require financial support to complete the examination process, this is currently unavailable. Finally, more and more Skilled Immigrants would like to have training in self-employment. However, if they are not on Employment Insurance they cannot access the program. Building on the experience of this program, self-employment training specifically for Skilled Immigrants would be an excellent extension of this program. Finally, this program is only available in Vernon to people living in the community. Word of mouth being what it is, VDISS often has to turn away Skilled Immigrants who live in Kelowna or Penticton, who are willing to travel to access the service.

In the region there are Employment Counsellors, ESL teachers, Settlement workers and other community workers who have specialized skills and knowledge that could assist in the development of new programming that would integrate skilled workers into the workforce. They represent a local “resource”, or strategic opportunity that could support the development of any new programming.

Please see Appendix B for a complete summary of agencies that provide Career Assessment and Planning Services. There is also a complete contact list of the agencies, and people who participated in this study.

A scan of the Integrated Bridging Services indicated that there are no programs like this in the Okanagan. Okanagan University College has attempted to launch an Integrated Bridging Program for nurses but to date; they have not been able to demonstrate that there would be enough students registered to justify the program.

The third task, to determine the [capacity of the Integrated Bridging System within the Okanagan Region, as stated](#) in the first interim report to MCAWS, there are problems with the Integrated Bridging System in the region. In the Inventory summary report, **Possibility Concepts** acknowledges that the Integrated Bridging System has potential in Vernon and Penticton and should be the foundation of any new programming. In both communities when you approach service providers and you indicate that the work you are doing is related to immigration, you are politely asked if you have contacted VDISS in Vernon and PDMS in Penticton. These communities tend to rely on VDISS and PDMS and are not always knowledgeable about how they could also work cooperatively with VDISS and PDMS to support Skilled Immigrants more effectively. The situation in Kelowna is completely different. The Integrated Bridging system in Kelowna is ineffectual due to a number of factors that include changes to HRSD funded programs and reductions in Ministry of Human Resource employment programs. The absence of an Immigrant Serving Society that has the resources to advocate for the issues faced by

newcomers in Kelowna was also a factor. The participation of key service providers indicates that there is a lot of interest in this issue and the community recognizes the need to service this “target” group more effectively.

Finally, in order to complete task four, five and six: **To determine the best strategies for developing regional capacity in order to address the labour market integration of skilled immigrants within the Okanagan Region; To support the identification of provincial tools and resources that could complement Career Assessment & Planning Services that exist in the Region, such as access to regulatory bodies that provide assessment of professional skills; To identify strategic opportunities and priorities for service delivery within the Okanagan Region.** **Possibility Concepts** invited the agencies that completed the surveys to participate in Community Advisory Committees. **Possibility Concepts** also made a presentation to the BCITP Net to invite Skilled Immigrants to participate in the Advisory Committees. **Possibility Concepts** also asked the Settlement workers to make referrals or invite interested clients to participate.

When the proposal was developed **Possibility Concepts** anticipated that there would be a need for 4-5 meetings in each community. However, the reality was that most committee members could not meet more than once a month. Committee members were prepared to participate through e-mail correspondence and so this was a secondary manner in which comments were solicited, (see Appendix A, for minutes of each meeting and a summary of recommendations).

What follows is a summary reporting of recommendations made by the Committees and an identification of strategic opportunities to recruit and retain foreign workers in the Okanagan. Finally, the report includes recommendations regarding the future direction that **Possibility Concepts** would advise the Ministry of Aboriginal, Community and Women’s Services (MCAWS) to consider.

The Advisory Committees identified four essential components to improving services for Skilled Immigrants in the Okanagan. MCAWS should include these components in any new program. English beyond level three is the priority for the region, along with a website that would improve communication regarding the issues faced by Skilled Immigrants. The components that relate to specialized Career Planning and Assessments and the Employment Developer are really inter-related. The Employment Developer is essential to assisting the Skilled Immigrants to bridge between Career Planning and Assessment Services and the actual Labour Market. Potentially, Employment Counsellors could be trained to provide the specialized services listed but the Employment Developer is a priority. Ideally, there needs to be a high level of communication between the coordinators of each component in order to ensure that the program is integrated. In addition, the program should support the integration of these “new services” with existing services such as Settlement and other Career Assessment and Planning programs in the region.

This program will need to be centralized and mobile. It must use innovative technology in order to be viable. There were several suggestions on how to make this work, this report will review this issue further when it explores strategic opportunities and priorities

for service delivery within the Okanagan region. One challenge for any service that is provided within the Okanagan region will be the long distance between communities. Driving at posted speeds it takes at least two hours to travel from Penticton to Vernon. This does not take into account winter travel or provision of service to outlying communities such as Keremeos in the South or Lumby in the North.

Finally, the Committee identified issues that the Provincial and Federal governments need to continue working on. Naomi Alboim states in best in her article “Integrating Immigrant Skills into the Canadian Economy” INSCAN Vol. 17 – No.4, “It is time for the government to catch up with the “on the ground” realities of immigrants. It is time for practical and effective public policy which ensures that we benefit from the wealth of immigrants skills and expertise.”

LANGUAGE COMPONENT

- ④ Skilled Immigrants in this region need access to English Language beyond the Canada Benchmark of level 3.
- ④ This program could be provided on-line if a TESL qualified teacher with knowledge of settlement were attached to the program. Potentially this program could be an innovation in Language delivery. It could use technology that would allow for students to be located in a different city from the teacher. It is critical that the learning experience continue to be interactive.
- ④ The teacher would be available in a Language Lab located ideally within the same premises of the ELSA agencies; they would be responsible for coordinating Study Groups, and conversational practice classes.
- ④ This teacher should also be computer literate and be able to teach an introductory computer course (1week intensive program offered 12 times a year or once a month on a rotational basis – Mornings for month 1, afternoons for month 2, and evenings for month 3. This would ensure that students who work could fit the course into their schedules).
- ④ The teacher would also coordinate study groups that would work toward preparing for equivalency exams (TOEFL, IELTS, and LPI).
- ④ The teacher would also support occupational language bridging based on occupational clusters such as Business, Health, & Trades.
- ④ All professional exams should make practice exams available on-line.
- ④ Students should be allowed to take the exam in their own community (A proctor could be hired on a fee for service to supervise the exam and ensure that the process is fair and transparent.)
- ④ The teacher would work with the OUC to develop standardized English within our region. They would also support students to challenge trades qualification and assist them with prior learning assessments.
- ④ The changes to Okanagan University College would seem to provide a strategic partnership that could enhance language programs.

WEBSITE COMPONENT

The committees noted that while an Internet site is an essential component of a program, it has limitations. It assumes that one has advanced English Language skills in order to read the information; it also assumes that everyone has the computer skills needed to access the information.

However, Internet programming could provide improved communication and provide critical pre-landing and post-landing information. It can provide access to English language skills and professional terminology. It can also create some access to networking opportunities through web based employer chat sites. Most importantly it can provide critical access to information by the people working in the field: employment counsellors, settlement workers, and/or ELSA teachers who can then assist Newcomer to access information they require.

Development of a Website similar to the Looking Ahead (www.lookingahead.bc.ca):

- ④ The Committee described an Okanagan Website that was similar to the Looking Ahead website. The Okanagan website would be dedicated to improving the labour market integration of immigrants in the Okanagan Region of British Columbia. Like the Looking Ahead site, it could also be a multi-sectoral initiative that would be guided by a Steering Committee of regional representatives from provincial and federal agencies, multicultural and immigrant serving organizations, education and credentialing institutions, public and private trainers and private sector employers)
- ④ The website should provide general information about the region:
 - ✓ Labour Market information: Should include list of major employers and what are the employment demands in the region.
 - ✓ Housing information – cost of owning or renting in Penticton, Kelowna and Vernon and in the outlying regions.
 - ✓ Detailed Geographic information
 - ✓ Climate: what's it like in Canada, does it snow for 6 months?
 - ✓ What should I know before I move here?
 - ✓ Shopping and services.
 - ✓ Cost of living related to the standard of living.
 - ✓ How does the Health system work?
 - ✓ How do I get a bank account, how long does it take, how do I get a credit rating?
 - ✓ What are the educational opportunities for all members of the family
 - ✓ Language Level required to function in the region (ex. Few services available in other languages).
 - ✓ Lifestyle information
 - ✓ Linking to other sites such as the Looking Ahead Initiative, BC Internationally Trained Professional Network, and the Workdestinations.org site.

- ④ The committee recognized potential partnerships for this website because it could be accessed by Canadians and Foreign Trained Professionals alike. Some of this information is already available on the Economic Development Commissions – Regional District Central Okanagan site. Other potential partners include:
 - a) Okanagan Partnership Initiative
 - b) Municipalities & Regional Districts
 - d) Okanagan Science & Technology Council

CAREER COUNSELLING & PLANNING COMPONENT

- ④ There is a need for education about the Canadian and Okanagan Employment culture context. It should focus on issues such as but not limited to how to network in the local community, nuances of language (such as I'll get back to you – does not mean you will get a return call), the role of volunteerism and the “casual” dress code.
- ④ There is also a need to provide some counselling as it relates to the “immigration experience” and the impact on self-image. An excellent resource that could be used is the video: *Walk a Mile (An Immigrant Experience in Canada)*. Several employment counsellors gave the same case example. A Skilled Immigrant expressed frustration because it was difficult to find work in their field. Immigrants assume that because they qualify to immigrate to Canada through a point system, they will be able to find work easily.
- ④ Development of a portfolio or e-portfolio that would provide the Okanagan employer with confidence that the Skilled Immigrant's experience is comparable with the work skills requirements for a new posting. The portfolio would also assist the Skilled Immigrant to market their skills and themselves.
- ④ The employer needs to know if the company in the foreign country was a world class company or a store front shop. The employer might assume that the newcomer is “over qualified or under qualified”.
- ④ Skills identification and matching for placement in the field for which the individual is trained or within a field where their skills are being used.
- ④ Development of a resume that a Canadian employer can understand. The resume must “translate” the foreign work experience into the Canadian context. In other words, what is equivalent work? For instance in the Technology field, did your employer manufacture component parts for computers or did it specialize in developing software?
- ④ Training for Employment counsellors – diversity training and training about the specific barriers to employment faced by Immigrants.

- ④ Educate Skilled Immigrants regarding the local labour market, labour laws and regulations.

LABOUR MARKET ATTACHMENT COMPONENT – EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPER

- ④ The Employment Developer would be a specialized HR consultant with extensive experience in the local community. They should be knowledgeable about the local Employment market. This person should be a business oriented, marketer, able to build a relationship with potential Employers.
- ④ The Employment Developer would work with Employers to bridge between Career Assessment and Planning services and Labour Market Attachment. For example one Employment counsellor recognized that a woman from South America trained to work in a Chemical Lab likely had the skills to do Soil analysis. However, she had to support the woman through the process of “translating” her foreign experience into the Canadian work context.
- ④ The Employment Developer would have the ability to inventory the skills the employer requires (demand) and link it to the skills of the Skilled Immigrants (supply).
- ④ They would network with the Economic Development Commissions in the region and work with the Okanagan Partnership Human Resource Flagship or “Skills Pipeline” initiative.
- ④ Access to targeted wage subsidy funds and/or other workplace incentives.
- ④ They would work with Employers to create ‘networking’ opportunities.
- ④ They would work with Employers to create a range of work placements that could include but not be limited to: 1) a laddered approach to employment, the Skilled Immigrant would take an entry level position that would advance to a more skilled position. 2) Volunteer position, 3) Mentorship opportunity, 4) Internship.
- ④ Placements would include a job coaching component that would ensure the success of placements.

PROVINCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Committees recognized that some of the work to support labour market attachment of Skilled Immigrants must engage government. The following is a summary.

- ④ Committees recognize the need for credential evaluation services that are user friendly, faster and more efficient. The province and the federal government must work with professional associations, unions and other regulatory bodies to ensure that this process becomes transparent, accountable, accessible and quicker.
- ④ Committees recognize the need for Provincial and Federal cooperation between Ministries and Departments. Services need to be integrated between all levels of government that provide services to either New Immigrants, or unemployed Canadians. Agencies include but not limited to: the Provincial Ministries of Skills Development & Labour, Advanced Education, Human Resources, Aboriginal, Community and Women's Services and Federal departments such as Social Development, Human Resources & Skill Development, Citizenship & Immigration Canada and Heritage Canada. Further, this cooperation must filter down to the regions and involve Municipal governments.
- ④ Provincial policies must be broadly developed to meet the unique needs of the region or immigration will continue to cluster in the Lower Mainland. For example, the funding received from the Federal Government for English Language and Settlement is divided into two envelopes. Half the funding is directed to colleges and half the funding is directed into MCAWS. This may be functional on the Coast where ultimately more than 70% of the funding is allocated. Outside the Lower Mainland this is not functional or prudent. If the government pooled those two pockets of funding and developed integrated services in each community, we would be able to avoid the competition that exists in the Region between ELSA service providers and the college. This competition for students is the result of attempting to develop viable programming on limited funding. OUC focuses its programs on foreign visitor and advertises ABE as an educational option for Foreigner educated students. Skilled immigrants desperate to improve their English proficiency end up in programs that do not meet their needs.
- ④ Finally all committees would like the criteria developed for acquisition of English Language to be uniform. Students must be confident that the credited English they learn in Vernon will be recognized in Edmonton.
- ④ Government needs to regulate Immigrant Agents, how much they can charge. They need to be able to demonstrate competency.
- ④ Government must recognize that there is a period of time before a program is well known in a community. Communities don't want pilot programs because they don't trust the program will follow through on commitments.
- ④ Tracking of student profiles from ELSA to determine their success rate – or rate of Labour market attachment.
- ④ Improved marketing of Settlement services to new Canadians who are fluent in English Language.

THE OKANAGAN REGION IN CONTEXT

In the Okanagan, there is a looming labour shortage caused by an aging population that is retiring earlier than in the past. Currently 18.5% of the population is over the age of 65 as compared to 13.5% for the rest of B.C. In addition, the number of retired citizens is estimated at 23% of the population and growing: “Kelowna today looks like Canada will look in 20 years.” (Capital News – Sunday, April 25th, 2004). The major employers, School Districts, the Interior Health Authority and the Municipalities are beginning to plan for this eventuality. In fact, in the same article (Capital News – Sunday, April 25th, 2004), Gary Leirer, Interior Health Authority states “that it’s time for Canada to become more accepting of foreign-trained professionals.

However, there continues to be resistance to new immigrants. According to the latest Statistics Canada census report 2001, the number of new immigrants in the Okanagan is down by 1% from 1996 to 2001. This is during a period where the in-migration into the Okanagan was responsible for 99% of the population growth. According to the Economic Development Commission of the Regional District Central Okanagan (RDCO), Kelowna is one of the fastest growing communities in British Columbia. The Capital News speculates that racism might be at the root of the “slowly changing ethnic mix” (March 22, 2004). According to one Skilled Immigrant, racism in Canada is “subtle”. This woman told a story about speaking to a potential client on the phone. On the phone the client seemed confident and willing to work with the woman. When the client came to the office, they met the woman, a visible minority, and they demanded another worker. According to the Population profile on the EDC – RDCO website, less than .05% of the population have visible minority status. In addition, Visible Minority is listed as Chinese, Asian, Japanese, Korean, Black, Filipino, Latin American, and Arab but does not include the large East Indian population. Also, of note, it does not define “Asian”.

During the course of this project, several Skilled Immigrants expressed frustration that on the one hand Canadians welcome Immigrants while on the other hand Canadians will state that “they would never hire an Immigrant” (Penticton newspaper – letter to the editor, as quoted by a Skilled Immigrant). Other Skilled Immigrants were frustrated because their credentials are questioned. Is their Masters Degree in Engineering, equivalent to a Canadian Masters Degree in Engineering? This could be racism or it could simply be an employer who lacks the experience to know if a Master Degree earned in another country is equivalent to a Masters Degree earned in Canada.

At the same time Settlement workers continue to have a percentage of clients who decide to move back to the Lower Mainland because they are unable to find employment locally within their field. This during a time when according to HRCC, overall unemployment in the Okanagan has dropped from about 8.8% in 2002 to 8.6% in 2003.

In order to ensure the Labour Market attachment of Skilled Immigrants in the Okanagan, one component of this program must focus on raising awareness. Community Leaders and the Business Community must begin to understand that diversity is key to economic prosperity and that Skilled Immigrants who work in their field can contribute to the

growth of the local economy. We must raise awareness of the “business case” for diversity. However, if we want to engage the Business Community we must also provide a forum where they can express their real “financial” concerns or the “cost” of hiring foreign workers within a venue where they will not be told that their concerns are racist. In the Okanagan it is estimated that 80% of employers are small business owners with less than twenty employees, (EDC-RDCO). Their capacity to absorb the real costs associated with extended orientation periods, increased training and potentially the need for a job coach or language training can not be ignored.

Other tools were identified that could support the Labour Market Attachment of Skilled Immigrants. A workshop designed to educate Community Leaders and Business people about the “business case” or economic advantages of a “diverse” workforce. A workshop designed to elicit from the Business community, the tools they require to support hiring of foreign trained workers. Still another workshop should be designed to orient Employment counsellors to the settlement and language services available through contracted service providers funded by Ministry of Community Aboriginal and Women’s Services. However if one reviews the Inventory of Services summary (Appendix B), few of the agencies or participants were able to describe tools or resources that they thought would support the Labour Market Attachment of Skilled Immigrants. Other tools may be needed to support the development of services in the region but at this point it would be premature to anticipate what tools might be of assistance. During advisory committee meetings, the groups conceptualized the “Okanagan” website (described under Website component – see page 6), this website could be the foundations of a new program.

In addition, provincial and federal sites need clear links to resources such as “Looking Ahead”, the BCIPN, and other organizations such as INSCAN (International Settlement Canada – Research Division for Refugees). INSCAN’s recent publication Volume 17 – No.4 included an excellent report: Integrating Immigrants Skills into the Canadian Economy: A Ten-Point Plan. The article clearly identified challenges that impact the entire country and were echoed by advisory committee members.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

The Okanagan Partnership is an initiative developed by Okanagan University College and funded by Federal and Provincial partners: www.okanaganpartnership.ca. In the first report submitted to the Ministry of Aboriginal, Community and Women’s Services, this initiative was identified as a strategic opportunity. The Okanagan Partnership is bringing together the community to collaborate on ways in which they can partner to build sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the region. There are six cluster groups that have been identified: Life Sciences, Knowledge Services, Value-added Agriculture, Wine and Beverage services, Aviation and Tourism. **Possibility Concepts** attended meetings for 3 of the 6 cluster groups: Knowledge sector, Life Science Sector and the Aviation Sector. **Possibility Concepts** raised the issue of labour market attachment for Skilled Immigrants in the region. The employers were very interested in learning how they could take advantage of the skills that foreign trained workers bring to this region.

The issue of Human Resource Planning was raised at all cluster group meetings and did become a Flagship Initiative (see attached summary report – Appendix C). **Possibility Concepts** was disappointed because many of the clusters identified improved integration of Skilled Immigrants as one potential solution to the labour shortage. The final report did not capture this point. **Possibility Concepts** was formally invited to the implementation launch of this project, and hopes to continue championing this issue.

The HRSD services provided by VDISS continue to be of interest to this project. This service represents a specialized service in the region, and is similar to the services funded by HRSD by the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia.

Perhaps, most interesting is that in the past couple of months, there were more media reports related to the Labour shortage and the issue of “ethnic mix” as well as a reporting of the deportation of a Foreigner worker on a work permit. These reports indicated that the Community is beginning to identify the need for in-migration in order to ensure the economic viability of the region, and Skilled Immigrants are one source of in-migration. In fact, according to INSCAN by the year 2011, 100% of Canada’s net labour force growth will depend on immigration. In addition, UBC – Okanagan was announced. This will bring more educational opportunities into the region. The BCITP Net has had its work hours extended from five hours a week to fifteen. In addition, during the final week of May, PDMS met with Minister Coell. **Possibility Concepts** was invited to attend the meeting. The Minister shared that he was meeting with the five Okanagan Mayors to discuss the issue of Immigration.

The media reports, UBC-Okanagan, BCITP Net, and the Okanagan Partnership Initiative, along with the Minister Coell meeting indicate to **Possibility Concepts** that it is imperative that the work begun in this project be given an opportunity to continue. There is a synergy occurring that could provide opportunities for partnership and joint funding. HRSD attended meetings in Penticton and Kelowna and expressed interest in Vernon. Should another project emerge, partnership with HRSD should be seriously explored. There is likely an opportunity to create a project that also reflects the needs of employers.

Possibility Concepts scheduled meetings with the Interior Health Authority (the largest employer in our region), Recruiting team. Due to the HEU strike the meeting was cancelled. However, two of the Recruiters responded to the same “employer” survey developed by Vancouver YMCA project: *An Employer Survey of the Under-Employment of Skilled Immigrants*. Again, while a willingness to explore the issue of Skilled Immigrants was evident, some of the responses also indicated a need for skill development and diversity training among senior hiring managers.

NEXT STEPS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Clearly, the Ministry of Aboriginal, Community and Women's (MCAWS) services needs to review how services are funded and delivered in the Okanagan. The committee discussed the issue of service models but did not come to consensus. The centralization of services that are mobile maybe met with some displeasure.

However, when one evaluates the current situation, it is clear that the four agencies providing services in the Okanagan are not meeting the needs of Skilled Immigrants.

MCAWS supports the administration of all four agencies. Two of the organizations focus exclusively on a mandate of providing services to Newcomers and work with their local communities to ensure that the contract objectives are met. In addition, these Societies provide many of the "Community Services" that support newcomer's integration such as assistance to attend appointments with a volunteer interpreter, maintaining a current list of translators and interpreters. They also provide opportunities for newcomers to socialize with Canadians and participate in community events in a non-threatening environment and practice new language skills. However, PDMS and VDISS run on tight budgets. If PDMS or VDISS cancel one ELSA class (due to poor attendance), the viability of there entire organization becomes an issue. The other two contracting agencies: Kelowna Community Resource Society and Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society while financially viable do not focus exclusively on issues faced by newcomers. They do an excellent job of ensuring that the services are delivered in a manner consistent with the contract obligations but they are not engaged in Community Development initiatives outside the contract mandate.

The Ministry for Aboriginal, Community and Women's Services needs to review its policy and relationship to contracting agencies. It needs to work in partnership with local Immigrant serving agencies and HRSD to develop a centralized model for operations that includes finance, administration, staff development, advertisement, communications and client registrations. At the same time this agency needs to develop three community offices that will ensure that service delivery is client centred and programming follows client needs. If one community has more educated Newcomers then potentially Settlement services can be provided using a group model, while in another community the clients might need more intensive one-on-one services. The services would reflect client needs and not contractual obligations beyond the outcome measures. The contracts should allow for flexibility in allocation of funding within program delivery budget lines. This new agency should work with Okangan University College and ensure that there is a seamless transition from ELSA to the OUC English classes. The Agency should be located centrally in Kelowna where the population is most concentrated. According to the BC Stats, Okanagan Population Forecast of the 300,000 people living in the Okanagan (from Vernon to the American border) 159,000 live in Kelowna. This new agency should include an Advisory Committee with representation from Penticton, Vernon, and Kelowna. This model has worked effectively with the Okangan Boys and Girls Clubs. In fact, there were several clubs that were considering closing their doors until this model of centralized operations was developed. The Okanagan Boys and Girls

Club centralized operational management of administration while maintaining local control of service delivery, to ensure a client-centred approach to programs.

Further, there would be a coordinator for each Contracting Streams: ELSA, Settlement, Bridging, and Career Planning and Assessment Services. These people would work with the Executive Director to develop three community office located in Penticton, Vernon and Kelowna. Each office could potentially develop specializations for instance, ELSA in Kelowna, Settlement in Penticton and Career Assessment and Planning Services in Vernon. Further working cooperatively with the Ministry, the contractor would examine the viability of developing a “Training Institute” following the Adult education model as presented on the Immigrant Serving Society website.

The Okanagan is one of the fastest growing areas in British Columbia. The current model does not serve the needs of Skilled Immigrants. There are too many incidents were Newcomers to the community fall through the “cracks” and do not receive the services they need to ensure integration. It is imperative that the Ministry work with the local community to develop a new agency that can ideally benefit from some of the expertise already in the region. Finally, the Ministry needs to review how other related funding from other Provincial Ministries is allocated in the region and ensure that funds related to the needs of newcomers are directed appropriately.

***Possibility Concepts** would like to recognize and thank the Vernon and District Immigrant Serving Society (VDISS), the Penticton Immigrant Serving Society (PDMS), Kelowna Community Resources (KCR) for hosting the community meetings and lending the assistance and expertise of their staff to this project. Further, **Possibility Concepts** would like to thank the participants who attended Advisory Committee meetings, responded to e-mails and made comments throughout the process.*

APPENDIX A

1) Background report to the Advisory Councils	1
2) Kelowna Meeting – April 16, 2004	6
3) Vernon Meeting – April 22, 2004	12
4) Vernon Meeting – May 12, 2004	17
5) Penticton Meeting – May 13, 2004	19
6) Kelowna Meeting – May 14, 2004	23
7) Penticton Meeting – Cancelled	26
8) Recommendations (as presented via e-mail to all committees)	27

APPENDIX B

- 1) Summary of Inventory
- 2) Contact List
- 3) Inventory of Services – template

APPENDIX C

- 1) Okanagan Partnership Initiative
(Regional Planning Flagship Initiative Skills Pipeline)