IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT: FINDINGS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

NOVEMBER 2013

Kim Chuong
Project Manager, Research Shop

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 3
  Research Goals ................................................................................................. 3
  Background ....................................................................................................... 3

Major Findings ........................................................................................................... 3
  Reasons for pursuing entrepreneurship ......................................................... 4
  Success Factors ............................................................................................... 4
  Challenges ........................................................................................................ 4
  Community Resources .................................................................................... 5

Key Recommendations ............................................................................................. 6

References & Resources ......................................................................................... 9
INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH GOALS

This report is adapted from a presentation to the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Action Team 4 on November 14, 2013, which aimed to support the Guelph-Wellington LIP Immigrant Entrepreneurship Project in enhancing local knowledge and improving support for local immigrant entrepreneurs. The purpose of this report is:

- To summarize the major findings from the focus groups and interviews that had been conducted by Guelph-Wellington LIP.
- To provide key recommendations based on the findings to better support local immigrant entrepreneurship.

BACKGROUND

- 3 focus groups and 3 phone interviews were conducted by Guelph Wellington LIP from June – July 2013. The aims of the focus groups and interviews were to understand the experiences of local immigrant entrepreneurs, the resources or services that they had accessed to help them start their business, and the difficulties or barriers that they had encountered. Notes were taken during those sessions.
- A total of 17 participants were recruited with 12 female and 5 male participants.
- 5 participants were entrepreneurs; 7 considering starting a business; and 5 did not disclose the information.

MAJOR FINDINGS

This section presents the major findings from the focus groups and interviews. Many of the findings are found to be similar to those that have been identified in other community reports on immigrant entrepreneurship (e.g. WISE-5 report, North York report, Maytree report on the Greater Toronto Area).
Reasons for pursuing entrepreneurship are diverse and may be a combination of the following factors:

- **“Pull factors”:** Freedom and independence; Flexibility of time; Finance (security or income supplement); Opportunity to showcase talents/skills; Opportunity to share one’s ethnic culture (food/art); Helping other immigrants.
- **“Push factors”:** Education or credential not recognized; Unemployment or under-employment in former profession.

Success factors contributing to business start-up:

- Passion for the business and being an entrepreneur
- Willing to take risk and work hard
- Having prior experience doing business
- Having support from family and friends
- Taking workshops to understand more about doing business in Canada
- Enhancing English skills
- Doing research and knowing the market and the community

Challenges to business start-up or business sustainability:

- Lack of financial start-up
- Access to loans or grants requires an established credit history in Canada
- Lack of familiarity with Canadian rules and regulations
- Limited social networks in the community
- Limited knowledge of resources or supports in the community
  - It was possible that resources or supports might be limited in the community.
  - Mention of no support specific for immigrant women interested in entrepreneurship.
- Ineligibility for programs – more programs geared to recent newcomers, but people don’t consider starting their own business until after a period of settlement in the country.
- Lack of support for existing businesses.
Community Resources

- Participants discussed more about what might be helpful resources to have in the community than about resources that they had used.
- There was mention of finding some workshops offered by local agencies helpful (Guelph-Wellington Enterprise Centre, Chamber of Commerce, Lutherwood, Innovation Guelph, and Immigrant Services).
- One participant mentioned paying high fees to attend some business workshops offered by the Cambridge and Guelph Chambers of Commerce, but he considered it “an investment”.
  - It should be noted that affordability could be an issue for other immigrants (e.g. affording workshop fee, affording childcare to attend workshops).

Resources identified by the participants as helpful to have in the community included:

- Workshops on Canadian business culture and regulations
- Affordable (or free) access to workshops, business advisors, and legal services
- Networking and mentorship opportunity (and more regular networking)
- Meeting successful entrepreneurs, particularly those of the same ethnic background
- Seeing success stories
- Having connection with other immigrant entrepreneurs
- Having individualized one-on-one support program. A participant mentioned that potential candidates for one-on-one support or mentorship program should undergo screening prior to being enrolled in the program to ensure interests and passion for entrepreneurship.
- Support for existing business
- More promotion of services and programs available in the community
- More promotion by service providers of the option to do business to immigrants
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key recommendations are made to address some of the challenges, as well as take into account helpful resources, as identified in the focus groups and interviews. Some of recommendations are also made based on the recommendations from other community reports which have identified similar challenges.

Service providers actively promote their services and programs

1.1 Ensure that programs and workshops, and their details, are listed and up-to-date on agency websites.
   - Programs and workshops on Canadian business culture, legal requirements and regulations, networking and marketing, and training to enhance English and business language skills are useful.

1.2 Explore different venues to raise awareness of services, including in-person and through virtual means such as the internet and social media. Using a variety of venues will ensure that a larger audience is reached.
   - e.g., Community events; pamphlet or booklet that can be distributed by service providers; social media

1.3 Explore the possibility of creating a centralized database that lists the available programs and workshops in the community and their details. This can also be used as an opportunity to review what services are available.

1.4 Arrange for in-person visits to settlement and language classes, college classes, community events and other appropriate venues. These visits can help raise awareness of available local services, facilitate dialogue between local agencies and immigrant entrepreneurs, and be used to assess unmet needs in terms of service offerings.

Service providers enhance accessibility to services and programs

2.1 Review service and program offerings to improve accessibility, including affordability, eligibility requirements, and provision of other supports (childcare, language support).
Some suggestions for affordability include sliding scale for fee payment and payment after initial successful establishment of the business.

Exploration of innovative local fund sources that can be tapped into (as discussed during the November LIP AT4 meeting).

2.2 Enhance services that support existing businesses to address new or ongoing challenges and support business growth.

- New entrepreneurs and longer-term entrepreneurs may have different needs and require different kinds of support.

**Service providers enhance opportunities for networking and mentorship**

3.1 Review available opportunities in the local community and promote them to immigrant entrepreneurs (See also Recommendations 1.1 – 1.4)

3.2 Enhance peer networks for potential and new immigrant entrepreneurs, and longer-term immigrant entrepreneurs to connect. These networks are great opportunities for immigrant to provide peer supports, share experiences, and exchange learning.

- e.g., networking website and forum; Business after 5; Coffee Chat

3.3 Enhance training and mentorship opportunities, particularly with other successful immigrant entrepreneurs. Training and mentorship programs that are more intensive and offered on a continuing basis can provide ongoing support, guidance and feedback.

**Service providers and relevant stakeholders celebrate success stories and promote entrepreneurship in the local community**

4.1 Collaborate and promote local entrepreneurship through dynamic community events. These events are great opportunities to celebrate success stories and raise awareness about small/medium businesses in the community, as well as provide networking opportunities and promote available resources and services.
There should also be some discussion about the reality and potential pitfalls of starting a business and emphasis on the necessity to find out about market needs, business location, and required regulations prior to starting the business.

4.2 Collaborate to review and advocate for initiatives (and policies) that can better support and facilitate small/medium businesses.

- e.g., access to financial start-up and low interest loan; exploration of innovative local fund sources; training program with income support; co-location opportunity for small emerging businesses.
REFERENCES & RESOURCES


Workforce Planning Hamilton (2012). *Winning strategies for immigrant entrepreneurship in five communities (WISE 5)*. Retrieved from
http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/226 (Final project report)
http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/227 (Executive summary)
http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/228 (Community guide)