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Settlement and Integration Services for Francophone Newcomers in Alberta: A Brief Overview

INTRODUCTION

This article is a brief overview of the welcome, settlement and integration services, working at the heart of Francophone communities in Alberta. A historical background, programs, impact, challenges and strategies of Albertan Francophone service providers and organizations will be explored.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the early 2000s, following discussions led by the Federation of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada (FCFA, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes) a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) Francophone Communities Committee was created by the Minister of CIC. The Committee received the mandate to develop strategies to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants in minority Francophone communities, as well as to facilitate their welcome and integration.

It was in this environment in which welcome and settlement centres were created in various Francophone communities outside of Quebec. These Francophone communities were in the minority as they were situated within Anglophone Canada. In Alberta, the first centre was established in Edmonton in 2003. The creation of this centre was linked to the commitment of two organizations, the Edmonton division of the Alberta French-Canadian Association (ACFA, l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta) and the Alberta Francophone Multicultural Association (AMFA, l'Association multiculturelle francophone de l'Alberta). In 2003, wanting to see the Edmonton Francophone community open up to, and benefit from, the arrival of Francophone newcomers drawn in by the province's economic boom, these two organizations mobilized the Welcome and Settlement Service (Service d'accueil et d'établissement) which would later be known as the Welcome and Settlement Center of Northern Alberta (CAE, Centre d'accueil et d'établissement). Two years later, another organization was created, the Calgary Welcome Centre for Francophone Newcomers (CANAF, Le Centre d'accueil des nouveaux arrivants



francophones de Calgary) with the support of the United Francophone Organizations (ROC, Regroupement des organismes francophones).

Apart from the centres which provide direct services for Francophone newcomers, other Francophone organizations also make significant contributions to the successful settlement and integration of immigrants. These bodies are present in various sectors and offer numerous services around employment and early childhood, elementary and secondary education. A list of some of the aforementioned organizations is provided below:

- Francophone Association of Brooks (l'Association francophones de Brooks)
- Alberta Immigrant Portal (PIA, Portail de l'immigrant en Alberta)
- Southern Alberta Early Childhood and Family Society (SPEFSA, Société de la Petite Enfance et de la Famille du Sud de l'Alberta)
- Alberta Francophone School Board Federation (Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta)
- Alberta Alliance of Youth and Family Society (AJFAS, Alliance Jeunesse Famille de l'Alberta Society)
- Career Connections (Connexions Carrière)
- Employment Access (Accès emploi)
- Guy-Lacombe Family Institute (Institut Guy-Lacombe de la Famille)

ACFA, the voice of the Albertan Francophone community, also works towards the development of the Francophone population in Alberta. Through its regional divisions, ACFA involves its local groups and Community Coordinators in the educational sector throughout Alberta.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OFFERED

Organizations that oversee the welcome, settlement and integration of Francophone newcomers offer sector-specific programs and services. The norms and requirements of these programs and services are reflective of the agreements that have been developed between the organizations and their funders. Consequently, organizations are able to offer the following services:

Edmonton:

A. Welcome and Settlement Centre of Northern Alberta (Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta)

- Assistance with initial move (locating housing and medical services)
- Information and orientation on Canada, Alberta and the new community
- Referrals to community resources and services
- Accompany clients through administrative procedures



- Counselling and support services
- ESL Summer Camps – Accredited Course
- ESL Summer Camps – Information Technology
- Orientation Week and Study Spaces for Newcomers
- Ethno-cultural collaboration and community support
- Social support and community networking
- Community connection activities (Exchange Day and Cultural Crossroads, Community Connections Tournament, Newcomer Welcome Day, Multicultural Christmas, Introduction to Winter Sports and Leisure)

B. Employment Access (Accès-Emploi)

- Employment counselling services
- Mental Health, Workplace Safety Course/Exam
- Job Search Workshops
- English courses
- Conversational English Workshops
- Job search resources

C. Alberta Alliance of Youth and Family Society (Alliance Jeunesse Famille de l'Alberta Society)

- Community forum on Francophone issues
- Prevention of family violence workshops
- Parade against racism and discrimination
- Summer camps

Calgary:

D. Calgary Welcome Centre for Francophone Newcomers (Centre d'accueil pour nouveaux arrivants francophones de Calgary)

- Welcome and settlement assistance (locating housing, information, and orientation)
- Bi-monthly information and integration workshops
- Referrals for other support services
- Counselling and referrals towards suitable services
- Accompanying clients, providing interpretation and translation services for clients with limited English skills
- Tax clinics
- Referrals to government, community and municipal services (such as health services, Alberta Works, Services Canada, etc.)
- Camps for Francophone and Francophile youth (summer, winter and spring)



- Orientation to Albertan daycares, elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities
- Special events for building community connections (such as “BBQ Franco Fun” in the summer and “Family Day Celebration” in the winter)

E. Alberta Immigrant Portal (Portail de l’immigration en Alberta Association)

- Community integration activities (Intercultural Evening Meet up, Multicultural Soccer Tournament, Franco-Festival)

F. Career Connections (Connexion carrière)

- One-on-one employment and career planning counseling
- Various workshops on different aspects and strategies of the job search
- English classes
- Job search resources

Fort McMurray:

G. Centre d’accueil et d’établissement du Nord de l’Alberta

- Assistance with initial move (housing research, medical services, etc.)
- Information and orientation on Canada, Alberta and the new community
- Referrals to community resources and services
- Accompany clients through administrative procedures
- Interpretation and translation for those with no English skills
- Social support and community networking
- Community connection activities (Exchange Day and Cultural Crossroads, Multicultural Christmas, Introduction to Winter Sports and Leisure, etc.)

Grand Prairie:

H. Centre pour les nouveaux arrivants de Grande Prairie

- Information and orientation on Canada, Alberta and Grand Prairie
- Referrals to appropriate resources
- Supportive counselling
- Interpretation and translation
- Ethno-cultural collaboration

Brooks:

I. Association francophone de Brooks

- Information and orientation workshops
- Canadian society youth integration activities
- French language and culture activities



Certain welcome organizations possess resources such as computers, printers and fax machines at their clients' disposal.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

From the creation of the various centres across Alberta in the early 2000s, Francophone service providers have continued to evolve within a minority community context. The results and impact of these organizations have been quite significant:

- Francophone newcomers continue to arrive in Alberta in growing numbers. For example, 67 clients were received in Edmonton when the CAE was first created in 2003. Today the CAE has received over 800 clients, without taking into account numerous non-eligible clients.
- This growth can be explained by, among other factors, the increasing awareness of Francophone migrants and immigrants that they are able to receive the services necessary for their settlement in integration in French in Alberta.
- While there was only a single Francophone newcomer welcome center in 2003, the Albertan Francophone community now has access to over five service posts. Since their inception these service points have diversified their projects in order to better serve newcomers.
- By virtue of the enterprising actions taken by these organizations, Francophone newcomers are now better welcomed and integrated into their local community. This is due to the fact that these centres are actively present inside the communities in which they operate. More and more clients are drawn to the workshops and activities provided by these organizations as they equip newcomers with the necessary tools to integrate into the Francophone and Albertan community alike. As a result, these organizations are able to solidify their reputation and credibility within the community; in addition to strengthening funder ties.
- Strong community and funder ties have led to the development and expansion of ethno-cultural associations' collaboration in newcomer integration.
- Welcome and integration organizations have developed tools made available to their clients and the community, to address the needs identified from the service beneficiaries.
- Partnerships have been developed with both Francophone and Anglophone organizations in order to be responsive to client needs. Examples of these organizations are: Food Bank, WINS, Sleep Country, Making Changes, Accès Emploi, YMCA, Be Fit for Life, EISA, CSS, and Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers



At the organizational level, the welcome, settlement and integration centres are part of the Network of Francophone Immigration (RIF, Réseau d'immigration francophone) a structure that operates in a similar manner to the Committee of Local Francophone Immigration (CLIF, Comité Locale de l'Immigration Francophone).

Moreover, in terms of impact, it is important to note that the welcome centers are a primary port of entry for Francophone newcomers in French-speaking Alberta. From this point of view, the centres help build the Francophone community in Alberta, by introducing new community members.

Additionally, these organizations promote Francophone newcomer civic participation so that their clients can have the opportunity to play an active role in their new community.

CHALLENGES

Francophone newcomers face many challenges in settlement and integration, some of which are listed below:

- As Alberta is a province with an Anglophone majority, the reality and experiences of Francophone newcomers are not very well known. Yet, since involvement of the entire community is critical in successful settlement and integration, the lack of understanding proves as a significant barrier.
- Francophone newcomers have limited awareness of Francophone communities existing outside of Quebec and Ontario in Canada. For this reason, it is necessary to promote Francophone settlement services at national and international levels so that Francophone newcomers recognize that there truly are vibrant and dynamic Francophone communities in Alberta.
- Francophone settlement organizations in Alberta are relatively young. They do not possess enough standalone resources to confront the challenges they face. In fact, they are entirely dependent on fundraising as a source of revenue. It is therefore necessary to diversify funding to ensure program viability and secure proposed newcomer services.
- With the growth of Francophone clients in Alberta, it is absolutely critical to develop the financial and human resources of Francophone organizations so that they are able to appropriately respond to their clients' diverse needs.



STRATEGIES

In regards to strategies to address the issues noted above, many activities have been initiated with the objective of improving services offered to clients, notably:

- The initiation of diverse projects which should lead to the creation of new programs and consequently the improvement of client service offerings.
- The reinforcement of partnerships with Anglophone organizations, as recommended at the National Immigration Conference.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this article provided an overview of the history, services and impact of Francophone service providers and organizations. It also examined the challenges and potential future directions of Francophone newcomer settlement and integration.

With the support of funders, clients and numerous partners within and outside the communities in which they operate, the welcome and settlement organizations offer services that contribute to the creation, maintenance and reinforcement of Alberta's Francophone community.