



# Social Capital and Meaningful Employment

## Social Capital: An Explanation

The concept of social capital has gained intellectual currency as a means to understand the relative strength of societies and communities. Social capital is a geographical, political, economic, and sociological concept based on the premise that an interpersonal network provides value to its members by giving them access to the social resources available within the community<sup>1</sup>. Social Capital generally encompasses tenets such as trust, social participation, informal and formal networks, civic engagement, and voluntary services.

Social capital can be experienced on three different levels: bonding capital, bridging capital, and linking capital<sup>2</sup>. *Bonding capital* refers to networks that exist within a group and between people who have common characteristics. Included in this category are family and community members of similar linguistic or ethnic backgrounds. *Bridging Capital* connotes networks that exist within groups that have different characteristics. This is exemplified through relationships between varying ethnic groups e.g. African and Jewish communities. *Linking Capital* refers to relationships or networks that are stratified within different societal levels that allow for the (linked) access to social and employment services among others.

An example of such relationships includes those between newcomer serving agencies and their clients. Research on social capital has emphasized the significance of social networks on both homogenous and heterogeneous levels. This article explores the role of *linking social capital*, understood as "norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal, or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society."<sup>3</sup> For example, newcomers' interactions with immigrant, local government, and health planning authorities are representative of linking capital.

Newcomers to Alberta are especially vulnerable to various social barriers, such as social exclusion and cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers. All newcomers have similar needs: employment, housing, a welcoming community, safe space for children, and psychosocial support.

<sup>1</sup> Social capital processes in cross cultural management. Staber, U., 2006. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 6 (2): 189-202

<sup>2</sup> Social capital, diversity, and the welfare state. Kay, F.M., 2007. *Reference and Research Book News* 22(2)

<sup>3</sup> Commentary: Bonding, bridging, and linking—but still not much going on. Blakely, T., Ivory, V., 2006. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35 (3): 614-615



It has been reported by immigrant serving agencies that newcomers to Alberta seek the support of settlement services to enable successful integration in their community. Cultural, social, and religious differences may present settlement issues for newcomers, particularly when acclimating to the competitive labour market in Canada. For those coming from a collectivist background, this transition to an individualistic culture may delay integration and successful employment.

A lack of social support is one of the greatest barriers to adjusting to a new society. Research shows that friends and relatives are essential in the cultural adjustment process of integration; further research suggests that not all newcomers have the same ability to attain social capital at the linking level, as it may be differentiated according to a individual's category of entry (e.g. Skilled Worker versus Refugee status)<sup>4</sup>. Recent provincial and national dispute regarding placement of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) displays the lack of competency in addressing the issue of optimum facilitation of skills and social capital amongst newcomers<sup>5</sup>. In an effort to address the rising concerns in the settlement sector, AAISA's membership of 19 settlement sector agencies offer instrumental services enhancing the newcomer experience through their social capital mandates.

## **Transitioning to Meaningful Employment**

Canada faced a labour shortage shortly after the 2008-2009 recession. The nation saw drastic increases in unemployment, reaching 8.7 per cent before falling back to an average of 7.2 percent<sup>6</sup>. The current climate is similar, with 1.33 million Canadians either un- or under-employed. The influx of 388,000 temporary foreign workers (TFWs) across the nation has served to fill low-skill jobs, however the well-being of newcomers with foreign credentials has been difficult to address. It is important to note that TFWs fill over 72,000 skilled and technical jobs across Canada, 50.3 per cent of who are in Alberta. While TFWs comprise a large number of temporary newcomers in the region, it is important to consider the skill match and meaningful employment of permanent newcomers arriving with foreign credentials.

<sup>4</sup> Outcome positive social ties and vulnerable population. Family and Community Support Services, City of Calgary, 2009. *FCSS Calgary research brief No 4.*

<sup>5</sup> Temporary foreign workers in Alberta: report shows flood of tfw as jobs disappear, wages fall. The Huffington Post Alberta, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> People without jobs — jobs without people: decoding Canada's 'skills crisis'. Flavelle, D., 2013. *The Star.*



AAISA member agencies across the province are faced with the ongoing challenge of serving newcomers, both employed and not. TFWs are considered a government program sponsored by employers and there is currently no government funding to serve this population. The lack of resources to assist TFWs in settlement is indicative of the nature of recruiting low-skilled labour for time-sensitive market needs. Despite the lack of resources, member agencies are attempting to offer services to permanent newcomers in order to support their integration and settlement needs. AAISA and its member agencies strive to provide settlement services in an absorbable and effective manner, ultimately facilitating the social capital of clients and practitioners.

At the provincial level, AAISA has established the annual Settlement and Integration Forum. The Forum brings together stakeholders from the private, non-profit, educational, government, justice, and health sectors in order to foster an inter-sector collaboration initiative. The first Forum was hosted on April 17, 2013. The Forum resulted in a third-party comprehensive analysis offering recommendations for future collaborations, sector concerns, and future forum structure. AAISA anticipates that the final report will proffer recommendations for practice and inform settlement practitioners directly serving newcomers in employment.

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) offers specific employment and training opportunities to newcomers and refugees in the Calgary area<sup>7</sup>. Their services include community development and integration, family and children services, resettlement and integration, health and wellness programs, and business employment and training (BETS). The BETS program is comprehensive and strives to link clients to opportunities and meaningful skills training. CCIS understands that meaningful employment empowers newcomers and enhances their settlement process, and the BETS program augments the skills newcomers already present. The program offers career and employment services, English as a second language courses (ESL), training programs, and computer training. Results from the AAISA SI Forum found that employers from the private sector wanted to see more training and language proficiency in their newcomer staff, and CCIS has made large bounds in the area of employment and language training in Calgary.

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) addresses issues of meaningful employment and education. Their programs offer resources for both

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<sup>7</sup> Calgary Catholic Immigration Society <http://www.ccis-calgary.ab.ca/>



newcomer job seekers and employers, creating opportunities for partnership and appropriate job match for their clients. Specifically, EMCN offers self-service and

drop-in supports for newcomers and their families. The program offers training in internet job searching, labour market information, computer services, and learning opportunities in the form of workshops. These workshops address the primary issues newcomers may face in seeking employment, such as resume writing, cold-calling skills, understanding Canadian workplace culture, and other valuable skills. The program meets clients where they are with what they have, building on their existing skill sets in order to ease their transition into the mainstream Canadian job market. Employers are seeking newcomers who are able to integrate into their workplace culture and the EMCN works with newcomers to focus their skills and understanding.

EMCN offers direct services for employers by utilizing Employer Liaisons. Essentially, these services align potential employers with job seekers. This program strives to ensure skill match and meaningful employment for both the newcomer and employer. EMCN recognizes that job-match is vital for both the employer and the employee. Meaningful employment will serve both parties and potentially increase the successful placement of newcomers in the future. This program has been very successful and has served as a template for inter-sector collaboration in job placement.<sup>8</sup>

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association offers skills-based training and programs for newcomer mothers in the Calgary area. Their programs include office administration training, childcare training, employment preparation, and bridging employment services. CIWA recognizes the unique barriers immigrant women may face upon entering the job market and offers social capital based programs to ease the transition. Specifically, CIWA offers the Links to Success program that offers 14 weeks of pre-employment training and 10 weeks of paid Canadian work experience, along with important office and job skills applicable in the Canadian market. Programs such as these are very successful and are beginning to bridge the gap between employer needs and job-seeker skills. CIWA's programs serve a population that can become economically vulnerable after immigrating to Canada and offer a culturally-sensitive approach to self-sustainability.

## **The Next Steps**

These programs in the settlement sector illustrate the significant social capital impact agencies are accomplishing. Social capital is not something that is taught

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<sup>8</sup> Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers <http://www.emcn.ab.ca/>



or created. Rather, social capital serves as a facet of ability in all newcomers in Alberta and Canada. Programs offering skill enhancement, culturally competent

training, and facilitating skill-match in the labour market are imperative to successful settlement and integration services across the nation.

AAISA continues to seek innovative ways to deliver effective methods of meeting the demand of newcomer needs in Alberta. All programs are evaluated in an outcomes-based model and seek to incur positive sector impact. Meaningful employment is a significant factor in successful integration and settlement among newcomers, though it is certainly not a singular facet. Settlement sector agencies and practitioners continue to provide a network of support services and professional development opportunities for staff members. It is important to note that the demand placed on newcomer services is high, and not commensurate to outputs or financial resources available. The discourse of social capital and its direct relation to successful integration would potentially open up channels for an increase in service accessibility and future funding.

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**Disclaimer: This report has been drafted, compiled, and reviewed by the AAISA Research Committee and staff person. It has not been sanctioned by any government agency representatives and should be confirmed as appropriate.**



A MESSAGE FROM **aaaisa**  
ALBERTA ASSOCIATION OF IMMIGRANT SERVING AGENCIES

**AAISA is dedicated to providing current, evidence-based research and policy updates to its Alberta member agencies and stakeholders. The Research and Policy Brief project serves to offer a detailed account regarding the issues directly facing the settlement sector across our province. Our goal is to offer our members and stakeholders the best information available to enhance and inform their practice.**

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