

Luring immigrants not enough [CA-NB]^[1]

Straight Goods

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EXCERPTS

Provinces must provide services and opportunities if they want new immigrants to stay.

New Brunswick wants immigrants.

In the hopes of having 25,000 more New Brunswickers by 2015, and 100,000 by 2026, the province has developed a new Population Growth Strategy. The government plans to spend much effort in attracting newcomers to the province, and perhaps more importantly, keeping new immigrants content to settle in New Brunswick long term. This shows an understanding of the importance of diversity to the survival of communities, but also an understanding that helping newcomers "thrive" within these communities is critical.

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In the strategy, the government promises to work with employers and communities to enhance immigration sponsorship, and to ensure that settlement programs such as childcare, housing and health care are available to all newcomers.

The Population Growth Secretariat will increase investment in English and French language training programs as well as multicultural organizations; re-evaluate labour market integration programs (eg how to recognize foreign work experience and professional credentials) while encouraging employers to develop workplace diversity programs; and make services available and relevant in rural contexts.

So many reasonable and achievable promises. But the realist in me, while always hopeful, sees almost daily examples of how essential services and resources let people down.

I was reminded of another report, published exactly a decade ago through Status of Women Canada. It focused on the situation of abused immigrant women in New Brunswick and the responses of the justice system and service providers to their needs. I searched for and found the passage from that report which had haunted me on first reading.

In it, one woman interviewed says of her immigration experience "I didn't receive any information about my legal rights in the area of abuse (upon arrival), but when I came to Canada I got a brochure which said that you cannot put oil in the sink."

It is laudable that the province will make information regarding new immigrants' rights and responsibilities available. We also welcome the recent announcement of a \$313,000 grant to the Multicultural Association of Fredericton by Status of Women Canada, to improve female newcomers' access to services and information — employment training, language programs, and resources to address women's issues like isolation and community leadership.

But, since none of this addresses the quality of services available to the general public, newcomers to the province will "join the gang" in being frustrated with the inadequacy in the funding and availability of these services. An immigrant parent who cannot fully participate in the labour force because New Brunswick has no family policy and a poor network of child care services, will opt for a more family-friendly province, for the same reasons that other New Brunswickers are saying "no babies, please."

For example, they may well find themselves among the estimated 18 percent of Canadians without a family doctor. Female immigrants — while they will be told they are legally entitled to earn equal pay for equal work and constitutionally guaranteed equality — will likely find themselves earning on average only 87 percent the salary of men, like the rest of us.

Female immigrants will be told they have the right to look to the province for refuge from abusive domestic relationships, and may well learn that there is a shortage of shelter, a dearth of quality affordable childcare and no civil legal aid to speak of. Immigrants will be encouraged to settle in rural areas but what about the need to address the inadequacy of services and resources in these regions?

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As the report said, the loss of extended family ties further confined women to tending to their family's needs. Inequality in the couple was sometimes increased after migration, as many a newcomer woman relied more on her spouse, a dependence compounded by her being unable to find work here — often despite professional qualifications — by lack of affordable child care, and by the male

spouse usually entering into certification programs first.

The proposed strategies to make initial relocation and long-term residency easier on newcomers are good ones and it is heartening to see that one local group has been funded to provide for the specific needs of woman immigrants. But these agencies have been handed an unenviable task.

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Immigration is good for the province, culturally and financially.

But, just as the potential of many already living here is limited by what governments decide to spend resources on and how services are funded, the potential and comfort of new immigrants will also be threatened.

- reprinted from Straight Goods

Region: New Brunswick ^[2]

Tags: diversity ^[3]

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