

The Final Report of

**The Experience of Immigrating to North Bay:**

Newcomer Settlement and Support Research Study

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## Executive Summary

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With the exception of census data, little information is known about the immigrant population in the North Bay area. In order to effectively plan for growth strategies involving the attraction and retention of new immigrants, a study was commissioned by the North Bay Newcomer Network to analyze the experience of immigrating to the area. This report presents the findings of that study and offers recommendations based on the voices of the newcomers who participated. In general, this study was designed to capture information relating to destination choice, settlement needs, and perceptions of North Bay and act as a complement to the recently released 2006 Census data on immigration trends.

According to the 2006 Census data, there have been notable increases in the number of immigrants choosing to settle in the area. The census shows the following:

- There has been an 18% increase in immigrants residing in the city of North Bay, and a 20% increase in Nipissing District, since 2001.
- There were 490 new arrivals in North Bay since 2001, translating to approximately 100 per year. 715 immigrants arrived in the larger Nipissing District (approximately 143 per year).
- New immigrants, those who have moved to Canada since 2001, make up 0.5% of the entire North Bay population which is up 150% from 0.2% in 2001.

It can be assumed that these trends will only increase if the appropriate measures are taken to ensure employment opportunities and that resources are put in place to support the settlement needs of these newcomers.

The results of this study seem to confirm this assumption. Interesting trends in the Northern immigration experience of the study participants suggests newcomers enjoy living in the North Bay area but often find it difficult to integrate and settle in the area due to the lack of available resources to help them adjust to the community.

87 individuals participated in this study and shared their experiences and comments about immigrating to, and living in North Bay. It is important to note that this research is not meant to be representative of, or generalizable to, the entire new immigrant population in the North Bay area.

### Snapshot of Participants

According to this study, the typical newcomer participant is an Asian male under the age of 50, who chose to move to North Bay to either pursue a Canadian education or to work (including owning a local business). This should be taken into consideration when developing strategies for the attraction of newcomers to North Bay and for creating programming to promote long-term settlement.

However, it must also be taken into consideration that there is great cultural and linguistic diversity represented in North Bay. Among the newcomer participants a **total of 32 countries and 32 different languages were represented**. Almost half (48%) come from

Asia and the Pacific (mirroring national trends). Excluding English, Chinese languages were the most commonly spoken (37%).

Additionally, almost half (48%) of the participants were either Canadian citizens or permanent residents at the time of this study suggesting that newcomers to Canada have a strong desire to build lives and stay permanently in the country. Another 40% were currently here on student visas, showing the strength and draw of North Bay's post-secondary institutions.

The majority of newcomer participants were highly educated with at least 60% arriving in Canada with post-secondary education. This means that, based on those who participated, North Bay has a very well-educated, skilled, and globally competent immigrant community who genuinely want to contribute to the growth and success of the area. It would be unfortunate if those strengths were not recognized and measures not taken to ensure that newcomers have equal opportunity to participate fully in the community.

### **Reasons for Moving to North Bay**

Two significant trends emerged in the reasons newcomers chose to move to North Bay. First, many of the study participants had come to North Bay to study, citing education as their primary reason for moving here (48%). This is due to the assistance provided by Nipissing University and Canadore College to encourage a significant number of international students to be involved in this study. The second most important reason given for moving to North Bay was employment opportunities (31%), including owning and operating local businesses.

### **Settlement Needs**

The overall purpose of this study was to understand how to best enhance the lives of newcomers to the North Bay area. There was overwhelming agreement that there is a need for local resources to assist new immigrants with settlement issues as they prepare their new lives in the community. Specifically, newcomers called for centralized services where they could, in one location, find the resources needed to meet their needs (including help finding employment, language assistance, community orientation, etc).

Over 67% indicated that having access to immigrant services was important or very important when settling in North Bay. Additionally, with over 43% indicating they had taken an English Language course in North Bay, and 83% listing learning English as important, many indicated a need for more accessible courses and better promotion of local language training programs.

Newcomers also identified a great need in regards to finding local employment. As previously mentioned, the study participants were well educated and skilled, yet many (84%) indicated that the work they were currently doing was different from the work they had done in their home country. This study found that many barriers still exist for immigrants attempting to access local employment.

## **Perceptions of North Bay**

In order to determine the strengths and weakness of North Bay as an immigrant destination, participants were asked to talk about their perceptions of the area. This information can aid in future attraction strategies and can also guide those working to address retention and settlement concerns.

The most commonly reported strength was the quality of life and access to nature (ie: parks, lakes). Study participants indicated that they feel safe and enjoy the quiet pace of North Bay.

Many newcomers to Canada come from large urban centres, and that may have been the reason why a lack of things to do (ie: arts, entertainment, shopping) was the most commonly reported weakness, along with the cold winters. Following closely was the difficulty finding employment. In fact, employment concerns were echoed throughout the study results. Difficulty finding suitable employment, gaining accreditation and Canadian experience, issues of discrimination were all cited as major barriers to employment and the main reason several had left, or were leaving, North Bay.

The majority of study participants (59%) indicated that they would recommend North Bay to other immigrants. However, there was still a hesitation among even those who responded positively, referring once again to difficulties in finding employment as a deterrent. As a note, 35% of the participants were currently planning on sponsoring or helping someone else immigrate to North Bay.

## **Recommendations**

In response to the voices, stories, and suggestions of those who participated, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Centralizing settlement information and resources, online and in an office location
- Creating a welcome package geared for new immigrants
- Developing an accessible networking database of key contacts in immigrant, cultural, and faith groups
- Developing bridging programs, such as mentorships, to assist newcomers into the local employment market
- Actively supporting and widely promoting the current English as Second Language (ESL) program
- Working with North Bay employers to increase their knowledge and cultural awareness to ensure fair and immigrant-friendly hiring practices
- Involving immigrants as active participants in community planning initiatives, specifically in the development of North Bay's immigration activities

**Overall, newcomers will choose North Bay if they are provided the things necessary to live healthy and happy lives: suitable employment, community acceptance, social ties, and access to service.** This is nothing more than what anyone, foreign- or Canadian-born, would expect.