

# Planting the Seeds of Progress

Ottawa's Immigration Strategy in Action

# 2011-12



Funded by:



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## Ottawa's success depends on immigration...

Immigration is responsible for 79% of Ottawa's population growth.

100% of Ottawa's net labour force growth depends on immigration.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>2006 Census

**The Ottawa Immigration Strategy** is the result of a year-long effort by a broad group of Ottawa stakeholders, set in motion by OLIP to develop a comprehensive and collaborative strategy for improving local capacity to attract, welcome and integrate immigrants, and by so doing contribute to the prosperity and vibrancy of this city. It sets long-term priority directions in seven areas: economic integration; education; health and wellbeing; settlement; language training and translation supports; institutional and community inclusion capacity development; and horizontal strategies designed to fuel and support local action.

## ...yet immigrants continue to struggle.

**Key challenges facing IMMIGRANTS include: finding work and training; locating housing; accessing health services; securing school success for their children; having credentials, education and experience recognized; and facing racism and discrimination.**

**Key challenges for the OTTAWA COMMUNITY include: building more effective welcoming structures; creating new labour market mechanisms for leveraging immigrants' talents; removing systemic barriers in the hiring of immigrants; developing new and shared awareness about the needs of a changing community; building organizational capacity to serve citizens of diverse backgrounds; leveraging the leadership of immigrant civic actors; and opening up opportunities to the community at large.**

Immigration is essential to Ottawa's prosperity and vitality, yet successful integration is not a reality for most newcomers. With a community-wide challenge as complex as immigrant integration, we need to make significant headway on multiple fronts to have an impact.

Out of this need was born the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) – a community-wide partnership of the four school boards, local universities and colleges, health and resource centres, settlement service providers, business and employer associations, social service agencies, regional planning bodies, immigrant civic organizations, and multiple City of Ottawa departments.

Working with all sectors, OLIP's role is to set common directions and priorities and facilitate collaborative leadership and coordinated action by partners working in multiple sectors, with the goal of creating new synergies and capacities. No single organization can succeed alone in our shared goal of successful attraction and integration of immigrants.

Understanding that immigration is essential to Ottawa's current and future success, OLIP has taken up the immigrant integration challenge with a sense of urgency and has galvanized new approaches to achieving collective impact. Already the early results of many initiatives are having an impact on how immigrants are supported in the community.

## Together with our partners, we are...

## ...promoting collaborative leadership.

### What it is.

A true paradigm shift is at work with OLIP, fuelled by the recognition that immigrant integration happens in communities and in neighbourhoods, and that it comprehensively affects all aspects of life. The OLIP mechanism for implementing the Ottawa Immigration Strategy includes venues for pursuing local action together, neighborhood engagement, and contribution to national level decisions on policies and programming.

A key premise for sustainable progress towards the goals of the Ottawa Immigration Strategy is our ability to explicitly link partners' priorities and plans with the goals of the strategy and ensure that action on the strategy is pursued as part of efforts to fulfill existing mandates of partners. Without this overt recognition and commitment by stakeholder organizations, we will continue to repeat acknowledging challenges with little concrete improvements. By bridging efforts across sectors to leverage the expertise and resources that already exist in the community, partner collaborations will propel meaningful change.

Our work to pursue explicit commitments and joint plans of action illustrates how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

- **Immigrant integration is now a municipal priority.** OLIP has worked closely with the City of Ottawa to promote the establishment of Council priorities that link with the Ottawa Immigration Strategy and explicitly focus on the attraction and integration of immigrants. From this alignment spawned a new structure (the Municipal Immigration Network) for linking initiatives across municipal departments, designated leadership, and a number of initiatives in collaboration with OLIP partners.
- **There are now plans to address the neighborhood dimension of immigrant integration.** OLIP is working with four community health centres in Ottawa to align priorities and develop collaborative action strategies that implement the goals of the Ottawa Immigration Strategy. Three key areas of collaboration include: research and planning to support cohesive social development in neighborhoods; greater access to community health services for immigrants; and civic engagement of immigrants, with specific focus on greater voter turnout by immigrants and greater participation and empowerment of immigrant civic actors.
- **A new provincial platform is serving as a mechanism for OLIP to inform policy and program evolution.** As the local planning and action work takes root, OLIP began to build alliances with other local immigration partnerships in Ontario. An Ontario working group was established by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to address policy and program issues brought forward by the local immigration partnerships.

Our work to promote collaborative leadership among the partners and to help them align with the new strategy creates common purpose among partners and moves them from aspiration to concrete joint priorities and plans that are consistent with the goals of the Ottawa Immigration Strategy. In this way, complementary work is taking place by multiple local actors in multiple sectors, based on past successes and creating new synergies and capacities.



Will he find meaningful work in his field? Will his children?

Together with our partners, we are working to remove the barriers that limit immigrants' ability to contribute to their full potential within the Ottawa economy.

## ... supporting learning, and developing shared understanding.

### What it is.

Knowing together precedes acting together. There is a considerable local knowledge in supporting the settlement and integration of immigrants, attained over long years of stakeholder experience. Often, however, this knowledge remains tacit and serves, at best, individual organizations or sectors. Our work leverages, consolidates and mobilizes the intelligence of local actors, with a view of building strong foundations for durable, community-wide impact.

OLIP's work in this area of activity is closely linked with our other two streams of work. The articulation of shared knowledge and the development of new learning and awareness is essential to planning coordinated action and to creating and solidifying commitments by partners. The nature, depth and formality of knowledge created or mobilized varies and ranges from quick scans on what is already known through review of grey and academic literature, to undertaking original research, to encouraging academic partners to address critical research needs. In all cases, OLIP's knowledge mobilization work is locally focused and finds its rationale in planned action.

- **OLIP is building service providers' capacity to serve immigrants.** Nine OLIP partners have launched a new collaborative initiative to build organizational capacity to be more welcoming to immigrants. Ottawa's Equity Project intends to promote immigrants' equitable access to social, health and education services by: drawing from, and building on, the experience of organizations; ceating a safe space for organizations to name challenges and gaps; facilitating inter-organizational learning; and developing shared knowledge and strategies.
- **New civic training will empower immigrant action.** The Ottawa Immigration Strategy urges that conditions be improved to enable immigrants and minority ethno-cultural communities to exercise strong, effective leadership and engage in the broader community. The OLIP partners recognize that an important pre-condition for effective participation and civic contribution of immigrants is having knowledge of how the Canadian system of government, education, health, housing, and child and youth services work. Without this knowledge, immigrant civic actors would remain at a disadvantage in exercising their citizenship responsibility and rights. The first in a new series of workshops on how the housing system works for neighborhood-based immigrant civic leaders is now in place.
- **A new lens will aid OLIP partners to plan for unique settlement and integration needs of Francophone immigrants.** OLIP, the Réseau de soutien de l'immigration Francophone, and the Centre on Governance have partnered to develop a Francophone Lens for the implementation of the Ottawa Immigration Strategy. The Lens is intended to be a technical tool that will aid the OLIP leaders tasked with the implementation of the strategy to understand and respond to the institutional context and the unique needs of Francophone immigrants.



### Will she get the care she needs, when and where she needs it?

Refugees arriving in Ottawa now benefit from a new medical clinic funded by the Champlain Local Health Integration Network. The clinic will receive \$100,000 annually to improve the quality of specialized health services for refugees. As an ancillary benefit, the clinic is expected to reduce avoidable emergency room visits thus alleviating stress on the health system as a whole.

## ... coordinating action across the multiple OLIP partners and sectors.

### What it is.

The power of collaborative action is well articulated by John Kania and Mark Kramer in their recent paper in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: “The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.” OLIP creates and facilitates countless opportunities for transparent and well-planned stakeholder discussions to identify joint actions on shared goals.

This stream of activity continues the work of the expert teams that developed the Ottawa Immigration Strategy. In their evolving role, these teams now scan the environment for opportunities and identify and prioritize competing actions on the sectoral strategies that comprise the strategy. Some of the work underway has led to remarkable results in a very short period:

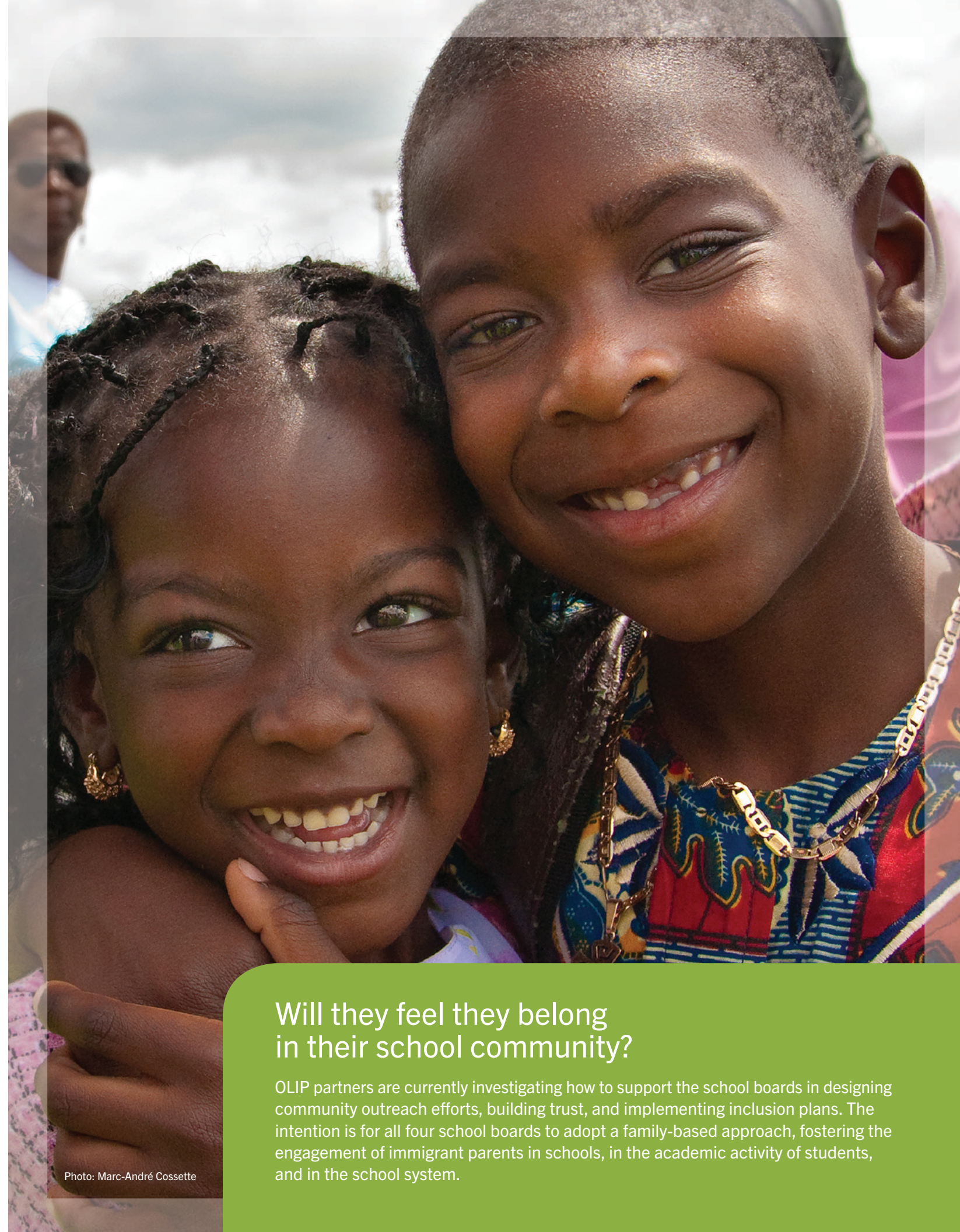
- **Multi-level action is taking place to establish Ottawa’s leadership in attracting, retaining and benefiting from immigrants’ entrepreneurial spirit.** These include: improvements to the City of Ottawa’s immigration portal; plans to establish a work experience program for immigrants; and new tools for supporting immigrants to access trades professions. Most recently, a microloan program has been established for unemployed or underemployed immigrants to help them create small businesses or to pay for bridge training.
- **Youth Futures stands on a firmer ground thanks to expanded partnerships and permanent funding of \$300,000 per year from the City of Ottawa.** The purpose of Youth Futures is to mitigate one of the most important barriers to higher education, namely the lack of family history in post-secondary education. The program targets youth in low-income neighborhoods who would be the first generation of their families to attend college or university. For immigrant youth with internationally trained parents, the challenge becomes not having family history in local post-secondary education.

The initiatives highlighted here are only a sampling of OLIP’s work across the sectors identified in the Ottawa Immigration Strategy. A fuller picture of these and other initiatives underway to change the immigration integration landscape in Ottawa is available at [olip-plio.ca](http://olip-plio.ca).

### Will they feel they belong in their school community?

OLIP partners are currently investigating how to support the school boards in designing community outreach efforts, building trust, and implementing inclusion plans. The intention is for all four school boards to adopt a family-based approach, fostering the engagement of immigrant parents in schools, in the academic activity of students, and in the school system.

Photo: Marc-André Cossette





## Shared goals, common commitment

Harnessing the collective expertise and insights of immigrant leaders, educators, health care practitioners, business leaders, local elected officials, civic groups and private citizens, OLIP is a leading approach to a challenge taking place in communities across Canada. Working with partners, OLIP is committed to removing the barriers that delay or limit the integration of immigrants into local life. Together, we can ensure Ottawa benefits from immigrants' contributions and, at the same time, enable immigrants, their families and communities to flourish and prosper.

As it enters its second year of implementation, OLIP is undertaking leading-edge work – work that could not happen without the commitment and collaboration of hundreds of people who are improving the lives of and opening up opportunities for immigrants in Ottawa. Their efforts have transformed Ottawa's first immigration strategy from a plan into action and impact.