

Minutes: SISC Working Group

Thursday April 16, 2020 - 2:30 pm to 3:30 pm (Virtual Meeting via Zoom)

Present: Paulina Wyrzykowski (TSLIP – The Neighbourhood Group), Cyril Ayeobore (TDSB), Adriana Pena (TSLIP – WoodGreen Community Services), Corina Carvallo (Skills for Change), Tahir Khan (TNLIP – TNO The Neighbourhood Organization), Acel Clemente (Central YMCA), Timothy Maxwell (Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services), Melissa Waterman, Trudy Small, Giovanni Rico (TSLIP-CCVT), Grace Macdonald (HWTC), Wahid Ifat (Rexdale Women), Catherine McNeely (University Settlement),

Regrets: Adeena Niazi (AWO), Valentina Briceno- Strocchia (Urban Matters), Pam Cardwell (TWLIP-Job Start), Sheeba Colvine (Toronto North LIP), Gloria Ressler (Mothercraft), Nestor Abdon, Nooria Amiri (AWO), Ruth Lee (CARE Center for Internationally Educated Nurses), Kaitlin Murray (JVS Toronto), Rakesh Bhardwaj (CultureLink), Maimuna Gaye, Andrew Ssawe, Yasmeen Tian.

Minutes: Adriana Pena (TSLIP – WoodGreen Community Services)

I= Information Di=Discussion Dc=Decision A=Action

	Agenda Item	Action(s)/ Follow up	Responsible	Due Date
I	<p>COVID-19 Updates (Presentation by Paulina)</p> <p>National Settlement Integration Council This is the primary way the Federal Government communicates with the settlement sector.</p> <p>Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>Settlement has been declared an essential service under the Public Safety Canada guidelines. This gives the sector some stability given the current circumstances where the borders are closed and newcomers are not coming to the country for the next several months, which raises questions on how funding levels will be impacted.</p> <p>Foreign trained medical professionals The government is trying to figure out ways that foreign trained medical professionals could assist with the COVID-19 response. WES, OCASI and TRIEC have advocated to get foreign trained medical professionals to be able to help in Ontario specifically with the covid-19 response. There hasn't been an official answer on this yet, but IRCC does support this motion. They are working with the provincial authorities to make it easier for foreign trained doctors and nurses to get jobs during the COVID-19 epidemic in healthcare. TSLIP will advocate for these changes to stay in place after the pandemic ends.</p> 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 materials Any materials around how to apply for the government benefits or any materials around COVID-19 need to be available in multiple languages. It would be the government's responsibility to make sure that those materials are professionally translated and then the settlement sector can fill in the gaps by providing supplemental materials. IRCC has agreed in principle that it is the government's responsibility to make sure these materials are available in the top newcomer languages. Resettlement under the refugee assistance program (RAP) RAP has been suspended because the borders are closed. In theory, anyone who was granted permanent residence prior to March 18th should be allowed to come into the country, and the program could be restarted. However, there are physical obstacles in place, such as flights cancellations. There's a specific RAP working group that has formed. IRCC and RAP service providers are trying to figure out the details of when the program can be restarted and where the resettled refugees could go, depending on individual communities' capacity to absorb them right now. Contribution Agreements 99% of the contribution agreements were signed by March 31st. There have been a couple of cases where agreements with municipalities weren't signed. Some municipalities have switched into an emergency state and for this reason they weren't able to sign the agreements on time. However, funding has been extended temporarily. Annual Performance Reports Annual performance reports won't be due until the end of August, instead of the initial deadline of the end of May. This extension has not been announced yet. 			
1	<p>Settlement sector umbrellas continue to advocate (Presentation by Paulina)</p> <p>The following are advocacy campaigns happening right now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligibility for the new government income support programs. As of today, the only people who are eligible to apply are the ones that have a valid social insurance number. Undocumented persons in Canada, who do not have a valid social insurance number won't be permitted to go through the application process. However, anybody with a valid social insurance number including refugee claimants will be able to apply presuming that they meet the other criteria (e.g. they had to stop working because of COVID-19 and they made at least \$5,000 in the last year or in the last 12 months regardless of where in the world they made that money). Income from other countries is acceptable, which means some temporary foreign workers will be eligible for this benefit. 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for additional resources to enhance the capacity of service providers and their clients to access services delivered remotely. In the initial phase, there were conversations around whether settlement agencies could pivot successfully to delivering services online. Most of the large agencies have now done so and many agencies are providing a range of services online. Smaller agencies may not have this capacity and may not be able to gain it very quickly. The clients' capacity to access online services is also a concern, especially now that in Ontario we have online learning for kids. There are questions around what parents can do if there's not enough bandwidth in the household and there's only one laptop: What do you prioritize, LINC classes or the kids 'schooling? • Wage subsidy program This is the government program that was announced two weeks ago that aims at supporting businesses that have lost at least 30% of their revenue. This benefit would provide a wage subsidy, so that businesses don't have to layoff their staff. This benefit does extend to non-profits, but in the settlement sector most of the non-profits are heavily funded by the government. It is kind of implausible that they were to suddenly lose 30% of their funding, so most of the agencies in the field do not qualify for the program as it stands. Some agencies may need to do layoffs on a smaller scale. • Canada benefit program There's continued advocacy around extending the Canada benefit program to all children regardless of the parents immigration status as well as making it available to recent newcomers who may not be able to file their taxes in the current circumstances. This benefit is based off your last year's income. You would not be able to receive it until you file your previous year taxes. There's a concern especially around recent newcomers to Canada who may not be able to file because few supports are available (e.g. tax clinics). 			
1	<p>Community Response Table (Presentation by Paulina)</p> <p>This is a table that meets 3 times a week with the city of Toronto and Community agencies. The focus of this table has been shelter and food security issues. There's a lot of conversations around the homeless population and their needs and how they're being met during the pandemic. The city is moving some individuals from existing shelters into hotels and into alternative locations in order to make it easier for people to practice social distancing within the shelters. Food security issues for seniors who can't leave their home is also a major concern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Red Cross has partnered with the city of Toronto to create a free food hamper delivery service for those individuals needing to self-isolate, either because they are over 70 or they're in quarantine and they don't have any other options for food delivery. 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public libraries are being used as pop-up food banks. This hasn't been promoted heavily. • Existing OW and ODSP clients are being offered a one-time supplement of \$100 per individual or \$200 per family for COVID-19 related expenses. If you currently receive OW or ODSP, you can call one of their offices and mention you need additional money for food or for hygiene products or cleaning supplies because of COVID-19 and you'll receive this one-time benefit. You can find more information about this benefit by visiting the 211 website or the city of Toronto's COVID-19 site. This information is also posted on the TSLIP website and will be shared on the April 17th weekly update. • There's also concerns around precarious newcomers and their fears about leaving their homes. They're worried about being carded by the police who can then report them to the CBSA and possibly having them detained under immigration detention. 			
I	<p>Overview of what the TSLIP is doing (Presentation by Paulina)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSLIP continues to work on the weekly updates with a focus on COVID-19. We have compiled a database of settlement programs still operating. Online programs for newcomers will be promoted again. Contact Adriana to have your program included in the next issue. • TSLIP continues to participate at various planning and stakeholder tables. • A new resource was created with the Health Network for Uninsured Clients explaining how newcomers without OHIP can access free assessments and healthcare during COVID-19. The barriers to healthcare stemming from lack of OHIP have been removed for the duration of the pandemic. Anybody should be able to access Healthcare right now. This resource has been posted to the TSLIP website. It will be sent out with the next weekly update and it is now being translated into six languages that are the top languages in Toronto. • TSLIP is also in the midst of conducting an interLIP newcomer needs assessment. A survey has been sent out asking partner agencies what the top needs are in newcomer communities. The purpose of this survey is to get a systemic high-level view across Toronto of what issues should be brought to all the tables the TSLIP is participating in. • Policy and public education. The TTC advocacy letter that was put together after the last SISC SW was sent to the Mayor's office. This letter asked for the city to make it clear they're not enforcing fair payment during the pandemic. A formal response has been received so far. 			

DI	<p>Needs Assessment Survey: emerging and greatest needs in the newcomer community. (Group discussion moderated by Paulina)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: TDSB is offering ELT classes online and one of the challenges identified are around computers: some families have only one device and one member of the household is also working from home. TDSB has been trying to stagger and delay classes to help clients with one device per household. The board has been working on giving every TDSB student a laptop. Newcomer parents who don't speak English may not know how to access these laptops. An email was sent to every parent offering language/translation services as necessary. The board has been trying to answer these emails in the newcomer parents' language and has given them instructions on how to fill out the form to arrange for the laptop pick up. Parents can drive through the centre and just pick the laptop up, there's no contact. It's a computer loan. A similar system could be implemented for settlement services and LINC classes and for programs moving online as the new normal. • Financial assistance: The government could relax some rules temporarily around applying for social assistance. A case was shared where a spouse who had sponsored his wife got laid off because of COVID-19 and the wife can't apply for social assistance given the sponsorship clause. There may be other newcomers facing a similar situation. On this sponsorship issue, it was suggested for the client to check with a local Legal Clinic offering immigration services. There might be a relaxation of the rules in this case. • Education: ESL classes are not up and running. Clients at TCDSB are being referred to LINC and ELT as long as they qualify to the online courses available. There are issues with bandwidth and laptops. Teachers are using the zoom platform so they can use the Blackboard. Not everybody is attending because some clients do not have access to a computer or laptop. • Care for Newcomer Children (CNC): CNC support is not being offered at this time at most agencies because classes are being offered remotely. Some CNC staff have been laid off. • Language assessments are a requirements to accept clients into LINC and ELT programs. Some clients were not able to complete this assessment. Agencies have communicated this challenge to IRCC. IRCC is working on this and they will share more details regarding this issue in the next few weeks. Students are being allowed to receive services because they can be entered in Icare in the meantime without an assessment result. There are concerns about students not signing up for ELT classes if they can't complete a language assessment. • Free Wi-Fi: Shaw communications is offering free Wi-Fi thought the city. Click here for more information. 			
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation could be approached to get laptops for clients that need them. • Internet access and cellphone daytime minutes are also a challenge for some clients, especially since the tribunals seem to be very determined to go ahead with hearings by teleconference. For landlord/tenants not all evictions have been suspended if there is an illegal act accusation or health and safety danger accusation. It is still possible for an eviction hearing to go forward, although the sheriff has stated to not evict anybody during the emergency. Some clients only check their messages at night when it's free. Some of them could be missing timely messages or not answering their phones during the day because of their limited cellphone plans. • CERB: it is important to caution people they make sure that when they are applying for this benefit they are answering all the questions correctly and honestly because the payment will come automatically and if there is an issue with eligibility later on the CRA will collect claw back this money. There's a concern about low-income individuals to be in a position where they owe anywhere from two thousand to eight thousand dollars to the CRA. • OW – ODSP discretionary emergency assistance: TESS has assured that no documents are required to apply for this benefit. However, clients are being asked to explain why they need this additional money. It's best for clients to call between 10 am and 2 pm. Some calls to TESS are going unanswered. • Access to services for new arrivals: some of the newcomers who arrived in March or late February are still in transitional housing, staying at an Airbnb and now they can't find permanent accommodation. Some of them are facing some challenges and don't know about the new benefits and how to apply for them. • Access to services for new clients: some virtual services are being offered mostly to existing clients. There is no protocol on what agencies should be doing regarding access to services for new clients. IRCC has communicated that new clients can be enrolled/complete an intake form by using a photograph of their PR card. • There's another concern around meeting consent when providing virtual services to existing clients. There are some alternatives on how to collect signatures from clients. Some agencies are using DocuSign. Others are using online registrations with a checkbox for the funder consent, with specific language around it. • There have been some staff layoffs at some agencies. 			
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International students: some Centennial College students are facing eviction notices from their landlords. There's really no specific ground for eviction and some landlords may be simply taking advantage of the students. The landlords are not adhering to the order that there will not be no enforcement of evictions during the pandemic. These students can be referred for legal counsel as they are being taken advantage of. These are students from the Progress campus. They can be referred to West Scarborough legal services. These students may not be able to pay rent because a lot of them work part-time jobs. The college is trying to implement an on campus food bank to help students out. • Precarious newcomers and those who are undocumented: most of these clients are staying at home because they're quite worried that with the new enforcement powers of the City of Toronto the police will refer them to see the CBSA and they may be detained (which is a concern because of covid-19). They are staying quite isolated at home and are not even taking advantage of the services that they are entitled to such as access to healthcare or some health programs. This issue was raised at the community response table. Assurances were given that the City will start inserting into its messaging that immigration status does not play a part in the social distancing enforcement program. It was also requested that the police services make a public statement as well. No response has been provided yet. The police official statement is that they're not referring people to CBSA as no one wants the detention centres to be full right now. There are bylaw officers from different jurisdictions ticketing people and not only the Toronto police. 			
DI - I	<p>Next Steps The TSLIP will be taking today's meeting feedback along with the needs assessment results and will share them with the different planning tables. The feedback will also be escalated to the right individuals. This WG will continue to meet every three weeks as the COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving.</p>			
I	<p>Next meeting The group suggested that the working group meetings take place once every three weeks.</p>	A Doodle poll will be sent to the group	Adriana	Week of April 20th