Helping Immigrant Youth Reach Their Potential through Successful Transitioning Into Adult Learning

Prepared by Bow Valley College

July 2007

Researchers: Diane Hardy & Lynn Collins
Writer: Lynn Collins

With special thanks to the teachers, students, and community leaders who took part in this project.
Contents:

1. Introduction.............................................................................................................3

2. A Review of the Literature.....................................................................................6

3. Findings from Focus Group and Questionnaires..............................................19

4. Recommendations.................................................................................................46

5. References............................................................................................................49

6. Appendices...........................................................................................................53
Section I

Introduction
Introduction

Background to Research
Immigrant youth, especially those with limited literacy skills, face many challenges when transitioning from high school to the adult learning context. Within this group, low levels of literacy, underdeveloped language skills, and a lack of strategies and support make the process not only difficult, but often impossible. The struggle facing young immigrant learners as they enter the relatively unknown world of adult education can be so daunting that many never secure a place in a suitable program.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this research was to investigate how to effectively help immigrant youth with limited literacy skills better adjust to the adult learning context. Young immigrant learners are growing in numbers, and there is a clear need for action if this group is to be given the opportunity to reach their potential and become productive members of society. We feel confident that this study will help ESL (English as a Second Language) providers create a better learning environment, enhanced career opportunities, and an improved quality of life for many young immigrant learners.

Research Process
The research for this project began in April 2007 with a literature review. The literature review focuses on the specific challenges facing immigrant youth and how these challenges affect their ability to adjust to the adult learning context. It also investigates the role that both educational institutions and community organisations play in supporting immigrant youth. For this portion of the project, current research was consulted as well as appropriate government policy documents.

The literature review was followed in May 2007 by a focus group session with immigrant youth currently attending classes at Bow Valley College. The focus group session
provided feedback and insights on the challenges faced directly from young immigrant learners studying in the adult education system.

In June 2007, questionnaires were distributed to various stakeholders, such as educational institutions and local organisations, serving immigrant youth. These questionnaires have given further insights from those currently trying to help immigrant learners make the transition from high school to adult learning.

This document is the culmination of the research and contains a review of the literature, findings from the focus group session and stakeholder questionnaires, and recommendations for steps to be taken to improve the transition process from high school to adult learning for immigrant youth.
Section II

A Review of the Literature
A Review of the Literature

Immigrants helped build this province and they continue to make valuable contributions to Alberta’s economic, social and cultural life. Immigrants are vital to sustaining the prosperity and continued development of Alberta’s economy, now and in the future (Alberta Government, 2005).

As we are all aware, Canada is a nation of immigrants. However, many of today’s immigrants are unable to fully contribute to the nation’s economy because they lack the necessary literacy and numeracy skills. According to ABC Canada (2006) sixty per cent of immigrants have low literacy, compared with thirty seven per cent of native-born Canadians. This statistic is disturbing enough on its own, but becomes even more so when we take into account the strong correlation that exists between literacy and economic wellbeing and growth. Firstly, adults with low literacy are about twice as likely to be unemployed (ABC Canada, 2006). In fact, the unemployment rate for those at the lower end of the educational scale is consistently higher than for any other group (Myers & de Broucker, 2006). Secondly, a rise of one per cent in literacy scores relative to the international average is associated with an eventual 2.5 per cent relative rise in labour productivity and a 1.5 per cent rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person (ABC Canada, 2006). Research actually indicates that those with less education are in fact at risk of being “left behind” in today’s economy (Myers & de Broucker, 2006).

The focus of this particular research is immigrant youth, a growing demographic within Canada, many of whom are seriously at risk of being left behind. According to the 2001 census, there were approximately 470,000 immigrant youth aged fifteen to twenty four living in Canada. This accounts for approximately nine per cent of the total Canadian immigrant population (Government of Canada, 2006). Many within this group are failing to succeed within the educational system. As a consequence, they face an adult life with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, and therefore limited prospects. A key contributing factor to this is that immigrant youth too often fail to successfully transition from high school to the adult learning context. This group of learners face
many barriers to their learning, and if they are to succeed in post-secondary education we need to take action to support and encourage them more effectively than we are at present.

As this particular demographic represents a large percentage of the next generation of adult Canadians, their educational achievement and subsequent contribution to the Canadian economy are of immediate and considerable importance. The federal government have recognised this by stating the following:

If Canada is to meet the economic and social challenges of the knowledge-based economy, it is critical that all our children and youth have the opportunity to fulfil their learning potential (Government of Canada, 2004).

In this same document, the government also acknowledge the positive impact that education has on those in the workforce, such as a greater likelihood of finding a suitable job, the increased career opportunities available and the potential of higher earnings. They also comment on the negative impact of an inadequate education, such as declining job prospects and unemployment. For youth who have not completed high school, the unemployment rate is more than eighteen per cent, compared with seven per cent for those with a university degree. The positive influence of education is also highlighted in a Statistics Canada study which indicates each additional year of education a person receives is worth approximately 8.3 per cent on their pay cheque (ABC Canada, 2006).

Evidently then, a sound education is necessary for success in the workforce and in today’s society. We live in a global economy that is becoming increasingly unsympathetic to those who do not have a post-secondary education. As a consequence, education can be considered something that shapes an individual’s socio-economic mobility (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, n.d.). ABC Canada (2005) state, the large numbers of adults lacking the necessary skills to fill many of the jobs
that the Canadian economy is creating is not only problematic, but it may also explain why Canada’s productivity performance over the past decade has been relatively weak.

Unfortunately, too many Albertans lack the necessary skills required for success in post-secondary learning. In fact, with the exception of apprenticeship training, Alberta’s post-secondary participation rates are among the lowest in Canada (Advanced Education and Technology, 2007). If this province is to compete in the global market, the needs of all learners must be met, and the large numbers of immigrant youth, many of whom are being underserved by the education system, must be allowed to fulfil their educational potential. This is recognised by the provincial government:

Strong and sustained economic growth has led to significant in-migration. Helping new Albertans and their families integrate successfully into the advanced learning system, labour force and society will allow them to reach their full potential while at the same time helping to address the needs of a growing economy (Advanced Education and Technology, 2007).

Immigrant youth face numerous obstacles in their lives related to language proficiency, cultural and social adaptation, and poverty (Morse, 2005). These barriers often become so overwhelming that studying becomes impossible. Many young immigrants not only have to cope with adapting to the rigours of a new life at home, school and on the street, they often find themselves “straddling the lines between cultures”, acting as interpreters and ambassadors for their parents in a still unfamiliar English-speaking world. Many parents of immigrant youth work long hours in low paid jobs; they make huge sacrifices for their children and yet are unable to give their offspring the educational and career guidance they so badly need (Rhor, 2004). It is imperative that these learners be adequately prepared for what lies ahead of them in order for them to make the right educational choices. To enable this, de Broucker (2005) recommends that schools assign adequate resources and manpower to ensure the relevant information, such as the cost versus the benefits of further education, is
made clear. He comments that this is especially important for those who are unlikely to receive guidance from their own families.

Some of the main challenges facing immigrant youth, and consequently affecting their educational decision making, have been identified by Bridging Refugee Youth & Children Services as follows:

- **Lack of parents or extended family.** This can mean not only a lack of emotional and social support, but also nobody to provide financial assistance with school fees, food, rent, etc.

- **The need to work and go to school at the same time.** This challenge is often made more difficult to cope with when an adolescent is still learning a second language and acting as an interpreter and cultural broker for the family.

- **Balancing the demands of two distinct cultures.** This may conflict with major life decisions, such as acceptable career paths and lifestyle choices, and the role of family members in these decisions.

- **Survivor guilt.** This may lead to learners dropping out of school to work in order to send money to family members in refugee camps or their country of origin, sacrificing their own advancement in the long-term in order to help others in the short-term.

- **Interrupted schooling.** This can make the academic challenges and expectations of regular, formal school frustrating. (Refugee Youth, 2006).

Weber (n.d.) also comments on the additional problems immigrant youth from disadvantaged backgrounds face, such as poverty, inadequate housing, dysfunctional families, substance abuse, and physical and mental health issues. All of which hinder entrance to, participation in, and eventual success within educational programs.
The multitude of life issues facing immigrant youth often manifest themselves in an inability to remain in a program. Weber (n.d.) tell us that programs catering to those who have already dropped out of the educational system once, often fail to prevent learners from dropping out a second time. He goes on to recommend that the adult education community find “concrete mechanisms” for connecting young adults to programs and keeping them engaged with their learning environment. Evidently this is a high-needs group of learners that needs more support than might be traditionally expected and offered.

Although statistics show that actual levels of education for immigrant youth are fairly similar to Canadian born youth, Canadian born youth traditionally have higher rates of completion for post-secondary education than immigrant youth (Government of Canada, 2006). According to traditional assimilation theory, first generation immigrants in particular are typically “held back” by their status as newcomers and as a result are not normally expected to achieve the same level of socioeconomic status as the native born population. This theory also suggests that immigrant youth will enjoy less educational achievement, and consequently fewer occupational opportunities, than their native born counterparts (Keller, 2006).

University of Alberta professor Dr. Harvey Krahn has conducted research with immigrant youth and found that their educational aspirations remain high in spite of the challenges facing them. His research concluded that seventy nine per cent of visible-minority immigrant youth hoped to earn at least one university degree, compared with fifty seven per cent of Canadian-born non-visible minority students. According to Krahn:

Educators working with immigrant youth – a growing number of the school-age population – may, at first glance, see young people who may have language difficulties and are trying to find a way to fit into a new culture. While it is important to recognise these barriers they are facing,
we need to also recognise their unusually high aspirations and to make sure that they have every opportunity to reach them (Barriers, 2006).

It is important that these aspirations are nurtured, not ignored, as we are already aware that a highly educated and qualified workforce is a key component of a successful economy.

In order to help young immigrant learners reach their educational and subsequent career goals, there has to be a network of support in place. The people within the education system working with learners play a key role as generally immigrant youth are dependent upon school personnel, such as instructors and counsellors, to help them overcome the barriers they face to completing their education (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2006). In this respect, instructors of young immigrant learners are challenged to extend their role as educators and develop skills that are more commonly associated with social workers, counsellors, or even parents (Weber, n.d.). This is a worthwhile endeavour as research shows that in almost every story of immigrant success there has been a caring adult who took an interest. The connections immigrant youth make with adults from outside the family group, such as teachers or community leaders, are important to both academic advancement and social development. These young people are often involved in a struggle to negotiate and understand their changing circumstances and caring, productive relationships with non-parent adults can provide immigrant youth with safe contexts for learning new cultural norms and practices, and access to information and guidance that is vital to success in school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2006).

Research carried out in the USA highlighted the fact that many immigrant youth actually long for a mentor to help them with issues that their immediate family members cannot. A mentor can help learners to navigate their way through the school system and on to the adult learning context, a task that can prove to be incomprehensible for many immigrant youth and their families (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2006). Myers and de Broucker (2006) note that although there has been major investment in the adult
education systems across Canada in the last five years, provincial systems remain “complex, fragmented and incomplete”, and “plain language information” about learning opportunities is difficult to obtain.

In 2001 the Alberta Government produced the Youth in Transition Policy Framework. It recognised that immigrant youth have unique needs as they transition into their lives in Canada and that Alberta’s youth would be considered one of the priorities for government ministries. It stated that the framework was designed to achieve these three key strategic outcomes:

- Youth acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives and contribute positively to society.
- Youth are safe, supported and connected to caring peers and adults.
- Youth are involved in and have access to a wide range of flexible services that meet their diverse and unique needs.

The Alberta government department of Advanced Education and Technology have also recognised the need for focus on the next generation of Albertans. In their 2007-2010 business plan they discuss the important issues of accessibility, affordability, diversity and collaboration, stating the following:

- Anyone who wants to pursue advanced learning in Alberta should be able to do so.
- Education must be affordable if it is to be an accessible lifelong pursuit for Albertans.
- Alberta's advanced learning and innovation system must respect a rich diversity of communities, cultures, traditions, learner aspirations and abilities.
- A resilient, responsive and adaptable learning system, as well as Alberta's ability to capture value through innovation, must be built on a strong foundation of partnerships, coalitions and networks so that efforts are aligned with desired outcomes.
The document goes on to comment upon the need for successful transitioning between educational institutions:

The success of adult learners depends upon their ability to make smooth transitions to, within and from the advanced learning system. Enhancing these transitions, along with increasing access to learning opportunities, will help Albertans achieve success in the advanced learning system and the labour market.

This Alberta government department has also released an Affordability Framework, with the objective of addressing the affordability of advanced education and increasing access and participation. Increased access is clearly something that needs to be addressed as it seems that although Canada’s education system is “open to all”, in reality, both financial and social barriers exist that exclude many from low-income backgrounds participating in post-secondary education (de Broucker, 2005). Myers and de Broucker (2006) highlight the inequality that exists between the secondary education offered to those under eighteen compared to that offered to those over eighteen who have not attained their high school diploma. They comment that due to the obvious “foundational benefits” of a secondary education, all high school-related upgrading programs should be provided free of charge, no matter what the age of the learner.

In some Canadian provinces, such as British Columbia and Ontario, the tuition for a high school diploma is free of charge for all learners, but this is not the case in Alberta. In Alberta students over the age of 19 must pay tuition fees, although in certain circumstances the department of Advanced Education will cover the cost of tuition and books. Myers and de Broucker (2006) comment that a major discouragement to learners to participate in post-secondary education may be the shortfall in Canada’s financial aid system. They say that this system is best suited for those learners who make a traditional journey from high school onto post-secondary education. As many learners have to combine work and study, they are left “juggling work and family responsibilities”, which can play a major role in their lack of success.
Alamprese (n.d.) talks of the benefits of counselling and referral services for helping learners succeed when moving on to post-secondary studies. She recommends an emphasis on offering learners individual help and encouragement in understanding the requirements for post-secondary study, guidance in determining whether their participation is feasible, and advice about which areas learners may need to strengthen their skills in. This approach would give necessary support to a group who may be struggling to cope with the demands of life and are in real need of assistance.

Immigrant youth have many diverse needs and face a multitude of barriers. Consequently, ensuring they have access to the support they need in order to succeed is no easy task. To address this, programs should either offer a range of services that meet the academic and social needs of learners or alternatively, establish links for learners with existing community-based support services (Weber, n.d.). Chekki (2006) talks of the wider role ethnic community groups can play in helping immigrants settle into their new environment; these organisations can help reduce the feelings of stress and alienation many immigrants feel and help them to see the contribution they can make to Canada’s multi-cultural society.

The involvement of the whole staff within the educational setting is important here. Successes with learners have been evident when staff has focused on issues that affect learners participation in programs, particularly during their first year of study. Guidance with goal-setting, and current and former students visiting classes to offer encouragement to other students, can be very effective (Dann-Messier & Kampits, n.d.). Lombardo (n.d.) talks of the importance of instructors’ taking a proactive role in the transition process with learners and that it can also be of considerable help if an advisor has actual ESL teaching experience.

It is also important that learners feel a sense of “school connectedness”, although this can be a major challenge for immigrant youth. Youth programs can work with schools here in order to provide the type of environment in which immigrant youth can
develop a sense of belonging (Easter & Refki, 2004). Schools themselves can also create this feeling of “connectedness”. Weber (n.d.) discusses the advantages of youth involvement in their own learning. He says that youth who are actively involved in decision making and are given roles of responsibility within their learning environment will probably find it difficult to criticise instructors or the educational establishment for being unhelpful or insensitive to their needs. This type of involvement is both motivational to learners and a successful learner retention strategy. Also, youth who are given some decision-making responsibilities are more likely to develop the confidence they need to successfully cope with the academic challenges they may have been unable to deal with in the past.

In addition to direct learner involvement, the power of peer pressure should not be underestimated. Both academics and the media have commented on the influential role peer pressure plays in youth participation in harmful behaviours. Peer pressure can, and should, therefore be used at the opposite end of the spectrum, as an instrument for encouraging positive behaviour and development (Parr, as cited in Weber, n.d.). Research has shown that youth whose peers have, or are perceived to have, higher educational ambitions are also more likely to have higher educational ambitions themselves and to be more engaged in school (Child Trends, as cited in Weber, n.d.). Krahn & Taylor (2005) reiterate this point and state that immigrant youth engagement with school, along with the engagement of their friends, has a real effect on their educational aspirations.

Another important factor in learner success and consequent transition to the adult learning context is orientation. This should include explanations regarding admission, registration and funding, and help with completion of any relevant program or course documentation (Alamprese, n.d.). Another key part of the orientation process is allowing learners to become familiar with their new surrounding before classes begin. Tours, open to all students planning to transition, can be motivating and can help to calm the fears of those about to make the move (Dann-Messier & Kampits, n.d.).
Helping immigrant youth successfully transition from high school to the adult learning context, where they can go on to fulfil their potential and make a significant contribution to the economy, is both an important and pressing matter. Too many young immigrants are leaving the education system without the skills and knowledge that will allow them to experience success in the workplace. Consequently, they will be unable to fulfill their ambitions and may never fully engage with Canadian society. Many employers in Alberta today are finding it difficult to fill jobs. There are severe shortages in areas such as health care, information and technology, tourism and hospitality, and construction. This situation may become even more critical over the next decade as Human Resources and Employment preliminary forecasts report that although 400,000 new jobs will be created in Alberta between 2004 and 2014, only 300,000 new workers will enter the labour market. Consequently, this may result in a shortage of 100,000 workers (Alberta Government, 2005). It is clear that we need skilled, educated citizens in this province if our current prosperity is to be maintained.

Equally serious, many new projects within the province are at risk unless enough people are found to fill this need. Currently, there are capital projects worth $107 billion either planned or underway in Alberta. Unless the province resolves the labour shortage, many of the projects will be delayed or cancelled. Not only could this damage Alberta’s international reputation but it could also have a negative impact on encouraging future investment in the province (Alberta Government, 2005).

Immigrant youth make up a significant percentage of Canadian society. For those who are unable to successfully transition from high school to the adult learning context, they may never be able to fully participate in this province’s growing economy. Statistics show that the more education and skills a young person has the better chance they have of finding a job and keeping it (Government of Canada, 2004). Clearly immigrant youth have educational and social needs that often exceed those of their native born counterparts. In order to support them in their educational journey, the research indicates that learners need to feel connected to programs and to be engaged and involved in their learning environment. They require solid educational and social
support, and adequate funding to allow them to remain in school when economic circumstances might otherwise force them to leave. In addition, thorough orientation before transitioning, and continued encouragement and support once in a program, can make a difference in how these vulnerable learners, who often lack both self confidence and self esteem, deal with the transition process.

It is clear that education plays a key role in career development, personal prosperity and economic wellbeing. Without an education, a person faces a future that is less secure, less prosperous and potentially less fulfilling. In the coming years, the province of Alberta will have an even greater need for an educated workforce with transferable skills. Both the federal and provincial governments have recognised this. It is therefore only right that immigrant youth be given the opportunity to be a part of the skilled workforce of the future and to benefit accordingly. In order to do this, they must be given the support they need to transition successfully from high school to the adult learning context. We need to give these young people the chance to realise their ambitions, to reach their potential and to make a contribution to the bright future we all hope to enjoy.
Section III

Findings from Focus Group and Questionnaires
Findings from Focus Group and Questionnaires

1) Focus Group

Process
A focus group session was held at Bow Valley College in May 2007 with immigrant youth currently attending classes at the college. This session provided the opportunity to gather information about the issues and challenges faced by immigrant youth as they transition into the adult learning context directly from those able to comment from their own personal experience.

The participants in this focus group were fourteen immigrant learners enrolled in the Bow Valley College Bridge Program. This is a youth transition program for immigrant learners between the ages of nineteen and twenty five, with limited literacy skills, who wish to transition into Basic Education/Upgrading classes. The number attending the session was evenly split between male and female learners.

The focus group was lead by two Bridge Program instructors. Learners were asked to consider and discuss three sets of questions. The first were concerned with experiences in the high school setting, the second with experiences in the college setting, and the third with experiences related to making the transition from high school to adult learning. The questions asked were as follows:

High School:
1. What problems did you have at high school that made it difficult to study?
2. How did you solve your problems?
3. What help did you get from your high school?
**College:**

4. What problems do you have at college that make it difficult to study?
5. How do you solve your problems?
6. What help can you get from the college?

**Making the Transition:**

7. What information do students need from high schools in order to go to college?
8. What information do students need from colleges to help them apply for programs?
9. What community support services would help students when they move from high school to college (e.g. child care, funding)?
10. Is it difficult to move from high school to college? Why?
11. Is it difficult to stay in college? Why?
12. What can colleges do to help students stay in school?

**Responses**

The responses to the questions asked in the focus group session are presented below in table form. The numbers quoted represent the number of actual responses, rather than the number of focus group participants. This has allowed for a more accurate representation of responses as some learners responded with more than one comment to a given question. A brief summary highlighting the most relevant points from the responses is given after each table.
High School:

1. What problems did you have at high school that made it difficult to study?

Table 1: Problems at high school that made it difficult to study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems at high school</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty speaking and/or communicating in English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty “keeping up” in mainstream classes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty understanding the teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes too big</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough help from teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many classes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of frustration/sadness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough ESL help</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation from other students because of time in ESL classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of patience from other (non ESL) students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that issues relating to language are of key concern to these learners. Problems with the language cause learners to experience difficulties in speaking and or communicating in English. Learners also have problems directly related to the classes they attend. They have difficulties “keeping up” in mainstream classes and understanding the teacher; they also feel that classes are too big, that there are too many classes, and that they do not receive enough help from their teachers. In addition, learners also experience emotional problems at high school, such as feelings of frustration, sadness and isolation, and regret over their lack of friends.
2. How did you solve your problems?

Table 2: How learners solved their own problems at high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solving problems at high school</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talked to teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t solve own problems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with other immigrant learners</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to get extra help at school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked friend of the family to translate in meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The low number of responses to this question indicates that these learners generally lack the strategies to solve their own problems, with some openly admitting to being unable to solve their problems. The table does show, however, that teachers and other community members can and do play a role in helping learners in this area.
3. What help did you get from your high school?

Table 3: The help learners received from their high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help received from high school</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESL teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help received</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners were unable to give examples of the actual help they received from their high schools, but instead chose to comment on who had helped them. This table confirms what is said above, that teachers certainly have a role to play in helping learners deal with problems that arise at high school, with ESL teachers being the members of staff most often chosen by immigrant learners within the high school setting.
College:

4. What problems do you have at college that make it difficult to study?

Table 4: The problems at college that make it difficult to study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems at college</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trying to balance work and school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with the language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of going to school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time in class</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers don’t understand personal problems</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues with friends</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the main problem learners face once they enter college is finance related. That is, they have problems balancing work and school, along with financing the cost of going to school. It also shows, however, that the language difficulties many experienced at high school are still an issue, and make studying at the college level a challenge. In addition, some learners also feel that they do not have enough time in class to study effectively.
5. How do you solve your problems?

Table 5: How learners solve their own problems at college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solving problems at college</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk to a counsellor/student advisor</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to the teacher/program coordinator</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to friends</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to family members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to classmates</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to boss at work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look around for solutions yourself</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for clarification</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to yourself</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The important role played by particular members of staff in helping learners solve their problems is reflected in this table. At the college level, learners will approach counsellors, teachers, and the program coordinator to help them solve their problems. The table indicates that a network of friends and family support is also important to learners during their time at college.
6. What help can you get from the college?

Table 6: The help learners received from the college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help received from college</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice from counsellor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from teacher/program coordinator</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find a job</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find a place to live</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time to complete classwork/homework</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing taxes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare costs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from nurse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table again shows that learners value the role of counsellors, teachers, and the program coordinator. Also, once again, the issue of funding is highlighted, with learners commenting on the significance of the help they receive related to funding in general, and in finding a job and a place to live.
Making the Transition:

7. What information do students need from high schools in order to go to college?

**Table 7: The information learners need from high schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information needed from high schools</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What college programs expect from students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What programs are available and what they offer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear idea of your “level” of English</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which college program would be the best fit</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long you will need to study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you need to get into college programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding available</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor/counselling support available</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners make it clear in this table that they feel they suffer from a lack of communication. That is, they need a clearer picture before leaving high school of what college programs are available, which one(s) would be the best fit for them, and what is expected of them at the college level. Learners also feel that they are not given a clear enough picture of their English “level” on leaving high school. Other issues concerning learners relate to how long they will need to study at college to achieve their goals, what the pre-requisites are for individual college programs, and the available funding.
8. What information do students need from colleges to help them apply for programs?

Table 8: The information learners need from colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information needed from colleges</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses available</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/counselling services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of courses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding available</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules (e.g. What happens if you fail a course?)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details on the application process</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility (e.g. is part-time/evening study an option?)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows again the belief learners have that they do not receive enough information regarding the programs and services available to them. They comment here that the information they would like to receive from colleges relates to course availability, counselling services, costs and funding.
9. What community support services would help students when they move from high school to college (e.g. child care, funding)?

Table 9: The community support services that would help the transition process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support services needed</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with costs e.g. tuition, bus passes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheaper housing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring/ESL classes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellors</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job searching</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again the topic of funding features here, with this table indicating that learners consider the help they would most like to receive from their community groups mainly relates to assistance with education-related costs, such as tuition and bus passes, and housing. Some also feel that additional ESL/educational support from within their community would help them in their transition to adult education.
10. **Is it difficult to move from high school to college? Why?**

Answered “yes”: 10
Answered “depends”: 4
Answered “no”: 0

**Table 10: Reasons moving from high school to college is difficult**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties moving from high school to college</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems with language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to get high school diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College expectations (e.g. behaviour, homework)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No direct entry into college program of choice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues already highlighted by learners are featured here once again. This table shows that problems with language are a key reason why transitioning from high school to college is difficult for this group. In addition, a lack of time to achieve a high school diploma, a lack of information regarding college expectations, and funding issues also add to the challenges in this area.
11. Is it difficult to stay in college? Why?

Answered “yes”: 8
Answered “depends”: 2
Answered “not difficult”: 4

Table 11: Reasons why staying in college is difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties staying in college</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing work and study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time needed to complete courses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints – need to pass to remain in program</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of course work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen before, this table also shows that financial matters are a major concern to this group. A lack of money and the difficulties in balancing work and school are key factors in whether staying in college is considered difficult or not. The table also shows that time plays a role, with the length of time learners need to stay in a program to complete it, and the time pressure to succeed, add to their problems at the college level.
12. What can colleges do to help students stay in school?

Table 12: What colleges can do to retain learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help needed from colleges</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More funding</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with goal setting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give more time to complete courses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More flexible schedules</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutors</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give credit for attendance and effort – not just grades</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that once again that a lack of funding is a major concern for these learners. This table confirms that learners consider adequate funding to be a key factor in their ability to stay in college, along with additional support from program staff relating to goal setting and scheduling.
Conclusions drawn from Focus Group

This group of immigrant youth made it clear that they face many issues in their transition from high school to the adult learning environment. However, during the course of the focus group session, certain key issues surfaced.

1) Learners consistently commented on the problems related to funding and the difficulties in balancing work and school. It appears that balancing work and school, and funding the cost of going to school, are the two factors that make staying in college difficult, and that receiving help with funding is the best way to keep learners in college.

2) Issues relating to language cause learners difficulties in high school, where they experience problems communicating with others in English, keeping up in mainstream classes, and understanding the teacher. Unfortunately, these problems do not disappear after high school. Many learners still experience difficulties at the college level, and language issues were sighted as a contributory factor to the difficult transition learners make from high school to college.

3) Learners state that they need a clearer picture before leaving high school of what college programs are available, which one(s) would be the best fit for them, and what is expected of learners by programs in colleges. They need this information to be more widely available at the high school level so they can be better informed before they make the transition to college.

4) Staff members clearly play a vital role in helping learners with problems that arise. Teachers, counsellors and program coordinators are of great importance to learners. These staff members are learners’ main source of support and guidance, and are often the only people this group will approach to obtain the help they need.
2) Questionnaires

Process
A questionnaire was distributed to various stakeholders serving immigrant youth. A total of twenty five questionnaires were sent to thirteen different organisations. These organisations included high schools, colleges and community groups. The questions asked were as follows:

1. **What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with limited literacy skills as they prepare to transition out of the high school setting?**

2. **What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with gaps in their formal education within the adult education system?**

3. **What action does your school/organization take to help immigrant youth cope with their challenges?**

4. **What action do you see immigrant youth taking to help themselves?**

5. **In your opinion, do immigrant youth find the transition from high school to the adult learning context difficult? If yes, please explain.**

6. **What could high schools do to better prepare these learners for the adult learning context?**

7. **What could colleges do to better help these learners succeed after they enter a program?**

8. **What role should community groups and immigrant serving organizations play in helping youth to transition from high school to the adult learning context?**
Responses

A total of ten responses were received.

A breakdown of the source of the responses is as follows:

*High School*: 1

*College*: 6

*Community Group*: 3

A summary of the questionnaire responses is below, with each question asked addressed separately. Responses have been condensed where appropriate, and any comments not directly relevant omitted. A brief summary highlighting the most significant points is given after each set of responses.

1. **What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with limited literacy skills as they prepare to transition out of the high school setting?**

   - A lot of youth are not familiar with the process of transitioning from one school setting to another. Many youth are challenged by the fact that they will be entering adult learning facility. There is a sense of resiliency, fear of unknown, etc. Many youth will not feel supported by the system.

   - Socio-economic challenge. Lack of awareness of school systems. Lack of awareness of how choices made can affect their futures. What options are available to them. Lack of awareness around navigating educational institutions.

   - Perseverance in the face of the long road ahead to gain literacy skills. Further education and workplace/career training. Feeling pressured to work to help support families.

   - Learning environment will be different. The non-academic support system will be different. Financial needs. Family responsibilities. Home learning environment. Adequate resources and quick response to learning needs. Duration to complete high school is vague/uncertain.


   - Many are somewhat immature for their ages/have difficulty taking the work they need to do seriously. Many have to work in order to support themselves or help their families out and often don’t have the time or energy to devote to their work.
• Such low literacy skills that they are unable to even enter training programs. Very unrealistic assessment of their literacy skills which often leads to refusal to enter a literacy program at an appropriate level because they will not accept the true assessment of their skills.

• Language/social. Misunderstanding of the system. Misunderstanding of literacy levels – students think they are more able than they actually are.

• Lack of life/literacy skills to prepare them for new systems and procedures. The change from one community of support to a new community of unknowns. Setting realistic and achievable goals for themselves/self evaluating their educational and vocational needs.

These responses indicate there are many challenges facing this group as they prepare to transition out of the high school setting. The main challenges relate to a general unfamiliarity with the education system and a lack of awareness as to what is available within the system; learners’ low literacy levels and misunderstandings that arise as a result of this; and the considerable family responsibilities and financial pressures many learners have to endure.
2. What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with gaps in their formal education within the adult education system?

- The age gap: younger participants have to adapt to the “grown ups” way of studying and attending the education system.

- Lack of knowledge of the system and how to navigate it.

- They perceive that it will take them years to catch up and be able to enter a professional career. They are very afraid of not having money or having to borrow money from the government. They often don’t understand the concept of student loans. They go to upgrading classes and do not receive enough attention. They find it unbearably boring, and don’t believe in themselves enough to stick with it.

- Fitting in. Having no/limited background in academic concepts. Lack of experience within a school culture. Lack of study skills.

- Time; awareness/understanding; confidence/ fear; money; lack of programming specific to their needs.

- The gaps themselves are a challenge because students don’t have the background knowledge, the skills, or the work habits they need to be successful in an academic setting.

- Lack of metacognitive skills needed to be independent learners. Many are facing personal challenges which impede their learning. Most have to work to support themselves and often work too many hours and too late at night to have the energy to do well in school.

- Age appropriateness. Knowing how to learn. Being in school regularly.

- They may not fully be aware of the gaps and not perceive a need to address them. They may feel shame and be afraid to ask for help. They may have learned to “mask” their weak areas and resist overcoming them. They may have very wide gaps between skill areas (very fluent speakers/very low level written literacy) and not fit neatly into a specific class or course; they may not initially have the social skills to fit in with older students.

Here, the responses point out that the main challenges facing this group within the adult education system centre around a lack of knowledge of the education system and how to navigate it. These learners often lack the necessary study skills for post-secondary education and when this is combined with the gaps that exist in their prior learning, their progress can be impeded. This group of learners also have serious concerns about the length of time it will take them to complete their education and the costs involved in this, with many struggling to balance their work and school commitments.
3. What action does your school/organization take to help immigrant youth cope with their challenges?

- A safe and supportive place for immigrant kids, teenagers, and young adults aged 12-24. Free recreational and employment help every day.

- Educational/career planning; short-term goal setting; referrals to programs that help learners with basic needs (counsellors, food banks, housing etc.); small, supportive learning environments.

- Employment counselling and a full-time experiential program. A mix of outdoor challenge, community service experiences, life skills and employment skills. The youth get to know each other. They gain a lot of confidence by being in an atmosphere of mattering.

- Small class; individualized attention; focus on literacy skills with some numeracy; values, virtues and life skills component; partnership/liaison with college for college readiness preparation program.

- Mathematics support for ESL students (15 -24) during summer and Saturdays during school year. Learning environment with computer, internet, printer, math work books. Employment search help. Search for free resources to enhance learning (dictionaries, used computers, etc.); listen to their stories, guide or refer them to appropriate agencies to get necessary support.

- Piloting a Youth in Transition Program. Upgrading is accessible after a one year break following high school age limits exceeded.

- In some cases an individualized approach; a later start time in the day so they can sleep in if necessary; bus passes to allay the cost of school.

- Counsellors; Student Employment Services.

- Events to welcome students; counselling/advising department; coordinators to direct youth to community agencies and services.

There is clearly valuable support being offered to immigrant youth from certain educational establishments and community organisations. The responses show that this support takes the form of small classes with focused literacy instruction; education and career planning; recreational activities within secure environments; and the availability of counsellors and support workers.
4. What action do you see immigrant youth taking to help themselves?

- There are many programs in the city that offer and give opportunity to young immigrant youth to speak about their life and their struggles in their daily lives. Problem is that many youth are not encouraged to join those organizations that could help them in developing an understanding in what they could do to help themselves. We need to be more proactive in finding ways to include immigrant youth in giving information to us that would best help to serve the needs of that population.

- To a large degree, immigrant youth do not have the social capital necessary to help themselves in Canada, however many immigrant youth appear to have found ways to gain employment and support themselves financially while in school.

- I see them seeking out programs that will help them succeed. I find that they often need a bridge between themselves and large academic institutions. We provide them the information and the coaching, and then they get the confidence to go in to BVC or other institutions to talk to someone.

- Making the effort to stay in school despite obstacles.

- They will try to survive even if we don’t help. They will get help from their own communities (mostly accommodation, social support). They also seek help from other agencies.

- I have not seen immigrant youth taking much initiative of their own but once offered an opportunity to continue their education, they have been making contact on their own once an initial introduction had been facilitated by the school based settlement worker.

- I see that they have to just try to focus on their school work as much as possible. They need to take a more active role in their learning and put in the necessary work.

- Developing study skills. Not working more hours than absolutely necessary.

- The youth in our program are motivated to be successful and contributing members of society but have had difficulty making the regular education system work for them. We have seen that they thrive when put in a situation that appropriately meets their needs.

- They seek out peers and in some cases older mentors among their classmates. I think many of them are eager to connect with our services – the library, learning centre, labs, e-mail and electronic bulletin board. Some seem to “connect” with caring instructors and ask for extra academic help and guidance.

Although it is clear that immigrant youth often have difficulties helping themselves, these responses indicate that many are successful in finding and keeping a job; seeking help from within the school system and/or the community; and persevering in school despite the many obstacles they face.
5. **In your opinion, do immigrant youth find the transition from high school to the adult learning context difficult? If yes, please explain.**

- They are often confused about the transition process and often do not see why they need to change schools.

- Many are not equipped to make the transition. They tend to be ill-informed of opportunities available to them, and do not have strategies and skills necessary to thrive in a post-secondary environment. These strategies include academic learning strategies as well strategies to function in an adult context. Immigrant youth are often not ready to take responsibility for their own education and learning when they arrive to an adult learning environment.

- They perceive that they will be there for years because of the upgrading they need. They worry about being lost in big institutions in terms of getting the help. They feel intimidated to ask for tutorial help or to tell their teachers they’re not keeping up. If these things happen, they just leave.

- It is difficult to make that transition to taking responsibility for one’s own learning: attendance, study skills, persevering in one’s own goals.

- Financial support is a major issue. Mostly they are expected to go to school and to work.

- Immaturity, lack of formal education, and the need to work part time.

- They feel safe in high school. Independence which not all are ready to handle. Responsible for their own learning.

- Difficult to be comfortable in classes with people much older than them.

- The self-reliance, self-awareness and independence expected of adult students can be a bit of a shock for youth. If youth are in the minority in an adult class, they can feel marginal and isolated. They may be reluctant to fully embrace their responsibility as mature students and not seek out the support they may need. The relationship between adult learners and their instructors tends to be different and this may require some adjustment.

These responses highlight some core reasons why the transition process is a difficult one for immigrant youth. Many learners are ill-equipped to transition successfully because they lack the necessary study skills to work independently; they are not ready to take the level of responsibility for their own learning necessary at the post-secondary level; and they struggle with financial issues related to balancing work and school, and funding the cost of going to school.
6. What could high schools do to better prepare these learners for the adult learning context?

- Give some education on adult learning context – give seminars to students who will need to attend adult learning school in the following year. Offer adult learning classes in schools.

- Provide information about career paths and options available to immigrant youth. Coach students by helping them set small, attainable goals to help them move towards an educational goal.

- Better quality and quantity of ESL. High schools need to work with immigrant service agencies to help meet the needs of these youth – counselling, career planning, cultural transitions. There needs to be a referral system for the youth that are dropping out.

- Place a greater emphasis on the ‘college readiness’ skills. Encourage students to be part of decision-making and goal-setting process. Enforce school standards and expectations, so students are taking increased responsibility for their own actions.

- Ensure a good study routine. Visit potential colleges.

- Create quality ESL programming. Become better informed of the differences amongst the group (both culturally and educationally) to better progress the students skills. Better educate the students on the credit/graduation requirements. Be better aware of the prerequisites college programs require (this does not always equal a high school diploma).

- I believe they do what they can and I honestly can’t see what else they can do that doesn’t involve a lot more staff.

- Place them in appropriate ESL classes in high school. Be honest about their abilities.

- Specialized programs in math and science for ESL learners. Many youth are not academically challenged. Make connections with the local colleges so that students are comfortable enough with that environment to make the transition.

- Overlap for a period of time. Bring in peer mentors who have made the transition. Have high school students “shadow” some college classes. Incorporate research about the college programs into the high school assignments. Incorporate life skills training/study skills/social skills training into academic work when appropriate. Get the adult care givers or parents involved in the process when possible.

Responses here indicate the need for learners to become better informed about college expectations while at high school, and suggest that establishing high school and college connections would be a useful approach. There is also a clear call for quality ESL instruction for learners while at high school to better prepare them for what lies ahead.
7. What could colleges do to better help these learners succeed after they enter a program?

- There would have to be some kind of seminar on adult education and how does it look like for someone who is just thinking of entering an adult education.

- Integrating learning strategies and goal-setting into the regular routine of the courses would help learners to take ownership and succeed in their program of study. Immigrant youth may not know how to succeed, and scaffolding is necessary to ensure learners have the needed strategies to become successful students.

- Mentoring; checking in with them; support groups; life skills circles; tutors.

- Encourage a positive learning environment. Continue to guide students to an understanding of college learning and adult responsibilities.

- Study skills, time management, routine study, budgeting, diet (Canadian food guide with comparison with ethnic foods.) as orientation sessions at colleges. A well-developed student centre will help the transition.

- Create quality transition programs. Assess on an individual basis. Be willing to consider portfolios as a record of achievement. Recognize their differences as being beneficial to the college environment.

- Special options such as integrating a physical component like going to the YMCA, offering a timetable to accommodate their situations, and field trips to make them more aware of their communities. Use materials meant for young people.

- Meet regularly with students during their first year to monitor progress. Students need to be held accountable for every class they miss and a proactive approach to solving problems should be taken.

- Provide youth friendly areas and/or events – sports areas, lounges, free concerts, open labs, life skill workshops. Counsellors/advisors trained in working with youth. Youth peer advisors of a variety of cultural groups. Sufficient financial aid/bursary/loan programs that can support youth beyond the initial phase of their college experience. Keep creating curriculum that is relevant and current and that emphasizes self-awareness and self-reflection. Keep checking in with the youth to re-calibrate goals and help direct and guide into other programs or opportunities.

The suggestion from these responses is that colleges could help learners succeed once they have entered a program by offering a network of on-going support, such as orientation sessions and mentoring, and assistance with developing study skills and setting goals.
8. What role should community groups and immigrant serving organizations play in helping youth to transition from high school to the adult learning context?

- Offer some direction and resources when it comes to educating about adult learning.

- Youth would greatly benefit from having some basic life necessities taken care of, so they could focus on and succeed in school: housing, medical concerns, single parenthood, living costs (food, bills, and other expenses) and basic needs.

- We can be a good bridge—helping them get the information they need when they’re exploring. I think we could also work in partnership to provide mentoring, support groups, life skills, confidence building, etc.

- Serve as resources: e.g. skill seminars; focus talk groups; support and information.

- Ethnic communities are helpful but they are always under-funded and not well developed. Immigrant serving agencies are not focusing academic support after school. After school programs should focus more on homework completion or extra work such as Kumon material or other ready made materials.

- These groups should encourage further education for youth without the linguistic abilities to find success in Canadian society, help in educating the schools, parents, community of the barriers facing this group and continue to be advocates for the target group.

- Offer free tutorials to help students with school work. They could be in touch with various businesses to help students find part time work.

- Promote appropriate programs. Help them to register.

- Help to solve family and/or settlement issues that affect attendance and the ability to do well in school. They could also be the bridge to help ensure students don’t fall through the gaps in the summer between high school and adult learning.

- The college can plug into neighbourhood houses and community groups by sharing resources, co-hosting events/workshops, and accessing “elders” or other leaders within cultural communities. There may be potential for mentoring programs or volunteer opportunities so that youth can gain experience and create networks. It would be proactive to ask community groups to help educate instructors and others involved with the immigrant youth about target cultures.

There are some particular ways that these respondents feel that the local community can help immigrant youth transition. These mainly relate to funding assistance, providing relevant information about programs/registration, and tutoring help. There is also the suggestion that these groups could act as a bridge, providing support and information to help learners transition from high school to college.
Conclusions drawn from Questionnaires

The stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire made many comments and suggestions, but as with the focus group session, certain key issues emerged.

1) This demographic lack knowledge of the education system and how to navigate it.

2) They lack awareness of what is expected of them at the college level and are insufficiently prepared for the independent study necessary in post-secondary classes.

2) A solid network of on-going support within the college setting is necessary once learners have transitioned.

3) Community groups have a role to play in supporting learners during the transition process and beyond.

4) Low literacy levels and poor language skills continually impede this group. In addition, learners are often unaware of their true language and literacy “level”.

5) Immigrant youth often have to endure considerable family responsibilities and financial pressures. Many struggle to balance their work and school commitments while trying to budget for the cost of going to school.
Section IV

Recommendations
Recommendations

The culmination of this research project is a set of recommendations for steps to be taken to improve the transition process from high school to adult learning for immigrant youth. These recommendations are as follows:

**Funding**
Funding is a major issue for immigrant youth. A large proportion of these learners have to balance work and study, and often find this too difficult to do successfully. As a result, large numbers within this demographic drop out of college and choose to work rather than to attend college. They are often forced to take low-paid, menial jobs, as their short term financial needs take priority over the long term gains of finishing their education and entering a career of their choice. At present, many immigrant youth do not qualify for sufficient funding to allow them to complete their basic education/upgrading. This leaves them with limited prospects and at risk of being left-behind in our growing economy. Consequently, we recommend that adequate funding be made available for all high-school-related upgrading programs, no matter what the age of the learner or length of time they have been out of high school. Giving immigrant youth the opportunity to attain this level of education without suffering financial hardship will allow them to make the first steps towards achieving their potential, and encourage them to become part of the next generation of Canadian citizens who contribute fully to the prosperity of the nation.

**Language Instruction and Support**
Many immigrant youth are prevented from making a successful transition to adult education by their low literacy levels, limited language skills and poor study skills. As a result, there needs to be high quality ESL instruction available to learners, with a focus on building literacy and study skills. This instruction must be delivered by staff members who are both qualified and supportive. Support from within the education system is important as young immigrant learners can be vulnerable and often receive very little assistance from their families. The support and guidance they receive from instructors
and other staff is often vital in helping them to cope with what can be the overwhelming challenges of school and family responsibilities. Many immigrant youth find that language and literacy issues are a barrier to their progress, and the problems that arise related to this can mean study in the adult education becomes too difficult to continue with. Quality language, literacy and study skills instruction, combined with a good support network, will give these learners the strong foundation they need to build the rest of their education on.

**Collaboration**
Many immigrant youth lack the necessary information about what is available to them, and what is expected of them, at the college level. There needs to be an effective system for articulating this information to learners before they leave high school. Schools and colleges should work together to improve articulation and collaborate to develop programs related to mentoring and orientation. Colleges should also work with community groups to become better informed about immigrant learners and allow those with the relevant expertise within the immigrant community to help with learner issues whenever appropriate. Immigrant youth must be given the opportunity to make informed decisions about their future learning choices and be supported by both the educational establishment and the community. They must also be clear about what is expected of them at the college level so that when they do transition they are not faced with situations they have no strategies to deal with. Closer collaboration between schools, colleges and community groups should prove effective in helping to address these issues and in easing the transition process for immigrant learners.
Section V

References
References

ABC Canada Literacy Foundation. (2005). *International adult literacy and skills survey (IALSS).*


Section VI

Appendices
Questions for Focus Group Sessions

Number of students attending: Male_____ Female _____ Date: ___________

Focus of Research: How can we effectively help immigrant youth with limited literacy skills better adjust to the adult learning context?

Please obtain student feedback on the following questions.

High School:

1. What problems did you have at high school that made it difficult to study?
2. How did you solve your problems?
3. What help did you get from your high school?

College:

4. What problems do you have at college that make it difficult to study?
5. How do you solve your problems?
6. What help can you get from the college?

Making the Transition:

7. What information do students need from high schools in order to go to college?
8. What information do students need from colleges to help them apply for programs?
9. What community support services would help students when they move from high school to college (e.g. child care, funding)?
10. Is it difficult to move from high school to college? Why?
11. Is it difficult to stay in College? Why?
12. What can colleges do to help students stay in school?
Questionnaire for Stakeholders

Name of school/organization: _______________________ Date: ________

**Focus of Research:** How can we effectively help immigrant youth with limited literacy skills better adjust to the adult learning context?

We are seeking your participation in a research project being conducted by Bow Valley College. This project is researching the issues and challenges which make the transition into adult learning a difficult, often impossible, process for immigrant youth with low literacy skills. This project involves a review of current research and government policy documents, focus group sessions with immigrant youth presently studying at Bow Valley College, and questionnaires to key stakeholders serving immigrant youth. The outcome of our research will be a report to include recommendations of steps to be taken to support the transition process from high school to adult learning for immigrant youth.

Please complete the questionnaire below. We greatly appreciate your participation in our research project and look forward to the valuable insight that you will provide.

Please respond to the following questions.

1. What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with limited literacy skills as they prepare to transition out of the high school setting?

2. What do you perceive as the main challenges facing immigrant youth with gaps in their formal education within the adult education system?

3. What action does your school/organization take to help immigrant youth cope with their challenges?
4. What action do you see immigrant youth taking to help themselves?

5. In your opinion, do immigrant youth find the transition from high school to the adult learning context difficult? If yes, please explain.

6. What could high schools do to better prepare these learners for the adult learning context?

7. What could colleges do to better help these learners succeed after they enter a program?

8. What role should community groups and immigrant serving organizations play in helping youth to transition from high school to the adult learning context?

Please return completed questionnaire to **Lynn Collins and Diane Hardy** by June 26, 2007
Fax: (403) 441-4740 or email: dhardy@bowvalleymcollege.ca