Making Use of Immigrant Skills to Strengthen Grand Erie (Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties)
Steering Committee

John Always
Physician

Dr. Madhumathi Appea
Internationally Educated Physician

Denis Barre
Owner: Total Business Solutions

Fadia Bishara

Chris Friel
Mayor of Brantford

Rita Marie Hadley
Planning Director Grand River District Health Council

Betty Anne Jackson
Grand Erie District School Board: Adult Education/ESL

Dave Levac
M.P.P. Brant

Lucy Marco
Immigrant Settlement Worker YMCA-YWCA of Brantford

Cindy Miaco
Business Administrator

Kim Richardson
President: KRTS Transportation Specialists Inc.

Dr. Rena Roy
Internationally Educated Physician

Sheila Sindwani
Business Administrator

Jane Stewart’s Office
M.P.

Heather Vanner
Human Resources

Jill Wood
Executive Director: Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board

Ex-Officio

Martin Appavoo
Director: Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board

Hanna Forfa
Hayden Industries Inc.

Project Funder
Department of Canadian Heritage

Lead Organizations
Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board
1100 Clarence Street South Suite 103B, Box 12 Brantford, Ontario, N3S 7N8

Centre for Research and Education in Human Services
73 King St. West Suite 202 Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1A7
519.741.1318
www.crehs.on.ca
Why Make Use of Immigrant Skills?

- Help relieve skill shortages resulting from an aging population and low birth rate.

- Compete in the increasingly global marketplace with international perspectives and connections.

- Job satisfaction of working in field of expertise contributes to personal, family and corporate well-being.

- Take advantage of human capital (“brain gain”) brought to our country.

- Benefit our economy with higher taxes, disposable income and increased productivity.

- Capitalize on savings in educational costs.

- Add new, innovative ideas in the workplace.

- Demonstrate that our society gives equal opportunity to all and embraces cultural diversity.
Executive Summary

Canada needs immigrants. We are increasingly dependent on immigrants for population growth and for skills to help strengthen our community and fuel our economy. It is estimated that by 2011, Canada’s entire net labour force growth will come from immigration.

The situation is the same in Grand Erie. A local labour market expert acknowledges the shortage of skilled workers and need to make better use of the skills which immigrants bring to Grand Erie. “Immigrant skills will need to be better utilized to fill our labour shortages.”

Grand Erie’s 3800 immigrants represent one obvious source in meeting the local labour market needs. Local data sources show a high number of immigrants educated in the very professions and trades that Grand Erie needs-most notably: physicians, nurses, teachers, and truck drivers.

Yet, we know that immigrant skills – the very skills that we need - are not being used to their full potential. This is a situation in which we all lose. Immigrants lose the opportunity to contribute productively to the economy, and to provide for themselves and their families. They lose the satisfaction of working in their area of expertise and passion. Other Canadians also lose. They lose the chance to have the local economy and service sectors strengthened by the “brain gain” of immigrants. They lose the competitive edge immigrants provide in a global marketplace. And they lose the opportunity to demonstrate why Canada is considered one of the world’s most welcoming countries.

Voices from all sectors are calling for change. These are the voices of leading academics, politicians, business people, and the media. Recognizing their increasing dependence on the skills brought by immigrants, leaders and citizens of Grand Erie are adding their voice to the growing chorus. Specifically they are calling on:

**Government:**
- The federal and provincial governments to demonstrate increased leadership toward removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated persons.

**Regulatory Bodies:**
- All occupational regulatory bodies to improve their standards of practice by ensuring licensing processes for internationally educated professionals are fair, timely, transparent and consistent.

**Employers:**
- Local employers to increasingly recognize immigrants’ skills through fair hiring practices and internship opportunities.

**Educational Institutions:**
- Post-secondary educational institutions across Ontario to demonstrate increased leadership in recognizing the prior learning of internationally-educated persons and responding to their educational and training upgrading needs.
# Table of Contents

Growing Voices for Change 4

Immigrant Skills…We Need Them 5

Immigrant Skills…We Have Them 7

Immigrant Skills…Let’s Use Them 9

Putting a Human Face on the Issue
   Transportation Industry 17
   Physicians 20
   Teachers 24

Adding Our Voice…A Local Call for Change 27

Conclusion 32

End Notes 33
Growing Voices for Change

The voices are growing. All across Canada and in Grand Erie the voices are getting louder.

The voices are saying that Canadians need the skills that immigrants bring to their new home country. They are saying that many immigrants are bringing the exact skills that we need to make our communities strong and vibrant. But, most importantly, they are saying that immigrant skills—the very skills that we need—are not being used to their full potential. We are left with a backlog of under-used skills.

In the end, we all lose. Immigrants lose the opportunity to contribute productively to the economy, and to provide for themselves and their family. They lose the satisfaction of working in the area of their expertise and passion. Other Canadians also lose. They lose the chance to have the local economy and service sectors strengthened by the “brain gain” of immigrants. They lose the competitive edge in a global marketplace. And they lose the opportunity to demonstrate that our society does more than just talk about being a welcoming country; the envy of the world.

This report captures the growing chorus of voices calling for a change to the present situation. The voices come from different quarters of society; from leading academics, politicians, business leaders, media, and the average person on the street. They were gathered through a one-year action research project called: Making Use of Immigrant Skills to Strengthen our Community.

Funded by Canadian Heritage this research project was led by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services a non-profit, social research organization located in Kitchener, Ontario. The project was guided by a diverse steering committee of community members from the business, political, immigrant, and non-profit sectors.

The project aimed to raise awareness about the need to use the skills of immigrants more fully. The project also wanted to mobilize people to call for change. Three communities were involved: Waterloo Region, London and Grand Erie (comprised of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties).

Information in this report was collected in a number of ways:

- Key informant interviews with experts in the field.
- A labour market scan of skills needed in Grand Erie.
- A survey of immigrant skills and the extent to which they are being used in these counties.
- An international media scan and document review.
- A series of case studies highlighting the human story behind the issue.

The report ends with the counties adding their own voice—a local call for change to be endorsed by local politicians and citizens.
Immigrant Skills... We Need Them

The Canadian Reality

Canada needs immigrants. We are increasingly dependent on immigrants for population growth, and for skills to help strengthen the community and fuel the economy.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business is finding that one in two businesses are concerned with the shortage of qualified labour—and this is a growing trend. In fact, a shortage of up to 1 million workers is expected in Canada within the next 20 years. Critical job shortages loom across the country, particularly in the health, education and construction fields. It is estimated that by 2011, Canada’s entire net labour force growth will come from immigration.

“An aging workforce approaching retirement coupled with smaller Canadian families and a declining birth rate means that in another 10 years Canada's pool of labour could be entirely dependent upon immigration for growth.”

As one of the world’s traditional immigrant-receiving countries, Canada has always needed immigrants to build a strong country. In recent years about 225,000 immigrants have come to Canada each year, with a desired target of about 300,000 (or 1% of the population) in years to come. The Canadian immigration system favours those with higher education and skills. The government assumes that these immigrants will “ensure that Canadian businesses are able to access the skilled workers they need to continue to grow and prosper in the 21st century.” This is a point not lost on our federal Minister of Immigration:

“Immigration has always played an important role in building Canadian society, and we can see that this trend is continuing.”

Canada is not alone in trying to recruit skilled workers. Many other industrialized nations have joined the rush in using immigration as an economic tool. The reasons for this trend are simple: 1) the world economy is increasingly becoming global (meaning that labour will need to move more freely between countries, much like capital has already done), and 2) there are changing demographics within industrialized nations (i.e., ageing populations and lower birth rates). The net result is a competition for immigrant skills needed to maintain standards of living.

While linking immigration and economics is nothing new, what is new is how intentional, aggressive and global the recruiting of foreign workers is becoming. There is an increasing world-wide competition for the ‘brightest and best’ workers in order to bolster national economic growth. As the Wall Street Journal recently quoted Singapore’s Minister of Trade and Industry:
A Reality for Grand Erie

The need for immigrant skills also hits closer to home. Grand Erie has a vibrant economy. Yet, it too has well documented skill shortages. This project’s own local 2003 Labour Market Scan has revealed a number of professions and trades in demand. These include:

**Regulated Professions**
1. Physician or Surgeon
2. Nurse/Practical Nurse
3. Teacher
4. Engineering Technician/Technologist
5. Speech-Language Pathologist
6. Physiotherapist
7. Psychologist

**Trades**
1. Professional Truck Operator
2. Construction Equipment Operator
3. Heavy Duty Equipment Operator
4. Automotive Service Technician
5. Electrician
6. Truck and Coach Technician
7. Industrial Technician
8. Industrial Mechanic Millwright
9. Fitter-Welder
10. Construction Millwright

Prominent on this list is health professions, most notably physicians and surgeons but a variety of other health professions as well. Given our region’s ageing population, the shortage of health professionals is of particular concern.

The Grand River District Health Council has acknowledged the challenges posed by the shortage of family physicians in meeting the needs of the over-65 population and the growing number of frail elderly. For the 3.3% of the adult population without a family physician, the experience of finding one has been described as “almost impossible” and “frustrating.” The shortage of local family physicians not only negatively impacts the quality of life for local citizens but can also act as a barrier when attracting business to the area. Also identified as priority occupations were nursing and professional truck driving.

Immigrant skills present one obvious source in meeting our local labour market needs. Like Canada as a whole, Grand Erie need immigrants. We need their skills to strengthen our local economy and work force. We need them to improve our quality of life and add to our social fabric.

“There’s a large untapped pool of skilled workers who are new Canadians and using them will be critical as Canada’s baby boomers begin to retire.”

“Unless we succeed in this [immigrant recruitment] game, we will lose in every other game. Talent attraction is the foundation of everything else we do.”
Immigrant Skills… We Have Them

Immigrants in Canada and Ontario

Canada has immigrants. Since its beginning as a country in 1867, approximately one-sixth of its population has remained foreign-born. Today, over 18% of all Canadians are immigrants—only Australia has a higher percentage of immigrants. Canada’s largest cities are particularly diverse. Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal’s percentage of foreign-born populations ranks very highly among world cities (#1, #3 and #7 respectively). Forty-four percent of Toronto residents are foreign-born. Its schools serve children from over 170 countries.

Each year approximately 60% of Canada’s immigrants come to Ontario. In each of the past few years, Ontario has received over 100,000 immigrants from 180 different countries. The vast majority settle in Toronto and along the highway 401 corridor. Immigrants are typically more educated than the average Ontario resident and bring many skills to their new community. Below is a breakdown of these skills. They include:

- Engineers (60% of all skilled immigrants)
- Engineering technicians/technologists (15%)
- Accountants (10%)
- Healthcare providers (9%)
- Teachers (2%)

Immigrants in Grand Erie

Grand Erie has also attracted and welcomed immigrants. The 2001 Census found that immigrants comprise 12% of the counties’ residents. Between 1991 and 2001, 3,840 new Canadians came to Grand Erie. Major immigrant groups to Brantford during this time period include those from: India, Pakistan, China, Poland, Vietnam, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

Recent immigrants have brought a variety of skills to the area. Some of these skills directly match those in demand. Citizenship and Immigration Canada collects information on the intended occupations of recent immigrants. We know that between 1997-2003, 1,003 immigrants arrived in Brantford (an average of 160/year). Some of these recent immigrants intended to find employment in the very professions and trades for which the region is currently experiencing need: 1 physician, 3 nurses, 3 teachers, 4 truck drivers, 4 heavy duty equipment operators and 3 construction millwrights arrived during this period.
Our own survey of 51 recent immigrants to Grand Erie (arriving between 1998-2003) confirm these findings. The counties receive a large number of highly educated immigrants. Half of the survey respondents had earned their BA and another 17% had completed either a Masters or PhD degree prior to arrival. Of those who indicated working in a specific profession prior to arrival in Canada, almost half were trained in professions that have been identified as in demand in Grand Erie. Top professions among survey respondents were engineers, teachers and nurses.

Other interesting survey findings:

- Of these, almost half (or 46.4%) were trained in professions that have been identified as the top ten in demand in Grand Erie.

- Of the top ten professional skills most needed in Grand Erie, survey respondents were most likely to have been a nurse or teacher.

There is no doubt that we have many immigrant skills in our community. It is interesting to notice that many of the skills brought by recent immigrants match the very professions that are most needed within our counties. Given this reality, the question needs to be raised: To what extent are we as a community making use of these skills?
Skills Aren’t Being Used

Canada needs to make better use of the skills brought by immigrants. Many research studies have shown how these skills are being underused. As early as 1988 the Ontario government commissioned a Task Force that identified barriers immigrants experience in accessing their profession or trade. Their Access Report recommended how to improve the situation.

By the 1990’s, newspaper headlines across Canada began pointing out the fact that immigrant skills continued to be wasted. A small sample of these are listed below:

“A great waste of potential: Many immigrant professionals forced to subsist on low-wage jobs, welfare.” Winnipeg Free Press, January 14 1995

“Degrees don’t mean jobs for third world professionals” The Toronto Star, June 17 1995

“Skilled immigrants meet job barriers: more trained people than ever are coming in but bureaucrats are not ready to handle them.” The Globe and Mail, November 19, 1996

“Canada wasting immigrant talent.” The Toronto Star, October 16, 1999

Also during the 1990’s, groups of internationally educated people began lobbying governments and occupational regulatory bodies (organizations set up by the province to regulate professions in the public interest and to decide who can enter a profession) to improve credential assessment and to take down discriminatory barriers. For its part, the provincial government created the Access to Professions and Trades Unit. Nationally, a Federal/Provincial Working Group on the issue was set up. Momentum to address the problem was building.

Yet, today the problem still remains. In fact, there is evidence that the trend toward excluding immigrant skills from the knowledge economy only seems to be getting worse. Many immigrants coming to Canada are still not able to use the very skills that helped them be accepted into this country.

A landmark Canadian study has just been released (September 2003) that makes this point strongly. Statistics Canada’s Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada spoke to 12,000 immigrants across Canada, 6 months after their arrival. The survey found:

- 6 in 10 immigrants already working did not work in the same occupational field as they did before coming to Canada.
- Finding employment was the area where most immigrants reported difficulty.
- While 70% found work, 42% of these were still looking for another position.
70% of immigrants looking for work identified at least one problem with the process.

About three-quarters (76%) of immigrants had a foreign credential (more than a high school diploma).

Lack of Canadian experience and difficulty in transferring qualifications were each cited by 26% of those who had foreign credentials and reported at least one problem when trying to enter the labour market.

Given their gloomy employment prospects, two-thirds of immigrants who already had a university degree intended to pursue further university-level training.

In Ontario, the situation is similar. Consider these findings from another recent study on immigrant professionals in regulated fields:

- The unemployment rate of internationally educated professionals is over three times as high as other people in Ontario.
- 60% of internationally educated professionals who took jobs unrelated to their training when they first came to Canada held the same job three years later.
- Less than one-quarter of internationally educated professionals who were employed were working in their exact field, and 47% were doing something unrelated to their field.

Another study by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre released in August 2003, adds to these findings. This study found that it now takes more than 10 years in Canada before the unemployment rate among immigrants drops to the level of native-born Canadians. This is double the time it took 20 years earlier. The result is that the Canadian economy is paying a price:

“Apart from issues of equity, health and well-being, or social cohesion, all Canadians should be concerned about a deepening transition penalty [the time it takes immigrant unemployment rates to match native-born rates] because it constitutes a large and growing under-utilization of labour and skills, which are particularly important in light of growing concerns about skill shortages.”

Voices Saying “Let’s Use Them”

The statistics are troubling. It is no surprise that in this new millennium, the voices calling for change are coming from many quarters. Cutting across political and demographic boundaries, these voices are united in saying that it makes no sense to waste the skills of immigrants.

We have already heard about how economists have been warning of the impending labour shortage. Leading demographer, David Foot, has warned that finding ways to make better use of immigrant skills is needed if we expect immigrants to be drawn to, and stay in, our country.

“Doctors, nurses and accountants are among the thousands of immigrants flocking to Toronto, and the city will flourish if we allow them to use their expertise, a leading economist says.”
Canada tries to pick the best-educated candidates for immigration, and making sure they can find work is crucial, University of Toronto economics professor David Foot said yesterday. ‘One of our major challenges is to make sure they fully use their skills,’ Foot said. ‘That's not always happening.’ 27

There is a recognition among other economists that our economy and community will prosper when people can do the work that they love. Richard Florida from Carnegie Mellon University has written about the link between creativity, diversity and economic prosperity. Central to his argument is that Canadian policy makers should find new and better ways to welcome and integrate immigrants into social and economic systems. In other words, encouraging immigrants to work in the area of their passion can serve as the foundation for economic growth and national prosperity. 28

Leading business associations and think tanks tend to agree. The Conference Board of Canada recently reported that more than 500,000 Canadians would earn an additional $4.1 billion to $5.9 billion annually if the experience and credentials of Canadians (notably immigrants) were recognized in the workplace. 29 In August 2003, the Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity released a working paper entitled Missing Opportunities. It demonstrates that Ontario’s cities benefit from a steady flow of well-educated immigrants. Yet these cities miss the opportunity to increase productivity and prosperity, in part, because of “an inability to take full advantage of immigrants’ human capital.” 30

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce echoed this concern. Nancy Hughes Anthony, the Chamber’s president, spoke of the need of not only recruiting more skilled immigrant workers to make the economy more productive and innovative, but also to help them find work in their field of expertise.

“If Canada plans to attract this level of immigration, the country also needs to be more accommodating in recognizing the skill levels of immigrants…”

Too many high-skilled people faced with the costs of repeating their studies or undertaking further training have simply given up, resulting in a significant productivity loss to Canada.” 31

Another voice for change comes from a 2003 report of the House of Commons Immigration Committee pointing out the “colossal” waste of human resources when immigrant skills are ignored.

“The current under-utilization of human resources [held by highly skilled and educated immigrants] is at odds with the country’s immigration goals.”

“Equally important, the impact on the individuals affected—the PhD who ends up driving a taxi, for example—is profound. This can become a significant mental health issue for newcomers.” 32

Internationally educated physicians have captured many of the media
Voices for Change: Grand Erie

headlines on this issue. The voices pointing out that qualified immigrant doctors could improve the province’s health care system are many. Consider this quotation from Dr. Claudette Chase, president of the Ontario College of Family Physicians:

“The effective means to bring qualified foreign-trained physicians currently living in Canada into the health-care system needs to be found…Aggressive action in this regard is critical to move qualified foreign-trained doctors from the sidelines into the game: there is no logic in having foreign-trained doctors driving cabs when severe doctor shortages are afflicting communities across the province.”

The voices are coming at a time when Canadian doctors themselves are increasingly under strain. A recent survey by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) found that nearly half of physicians were in “an advanced phase of burnout”, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and feelings of ineffectiveness in their work. These findings have left the president of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students worried that the best and brightest candidates will be deterred from entering the medical field.

Solutions are Needed

Increasingly, the voices for change are becoming frustrated with inaction. Consequently, they are not only pointing out problems but are also offering solutions—solutions that need to be urgently implemented.

Provincially, internationally educated advocacy groups are offering suggestions to professional regulatory bodies, government ministries, politicians, educational institutions, and employers that would remove barriers and allow immigrants to use their skills in the workforce. In some professions, progress has been made. For example, some regulatory bodies (e.g., in the pharmacy and midwife fields) have begun to reassess how their regulations apply to people trained internationally. For the most part, however, change is slow.

Locally, a budding recognition of the importance of using immigrant skills to strengthen our communities has lead to increased calls for change. The Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board has recently identified access to professions and trades for the internationally educated as an issue which urgently needs to be addressed. A local steering group has also been formed to raise community awareness that better utilizing immigrant skills will strengthen our community.

Further indications of this growing awareness is local involvement with the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT), a provincial umbrella organization with the long-term goal of improving the economic and social integration to Canada for individuals who are professionals and tradespeople in regulated fields. The smaller number of newcomers to Grand Erie, relative to bigger centers such as Toronto and London, poses additional challenges as these groups struggle to ensure that they do not become “the hole in the middle of the donut”.

Voices for Change: Grand Erie
At the political level, each of the three main political parties in Ontario has made immigrant skills a part of their political agenda. The recent throne speech of the Progressive Conservatives made reference to the issue of the internationally educated. For example, it said that the “government will encourage skilled, internationally trained workers to settle in Ontario and build new lives here.”

The Liberal party platform calls access to trades by foreign professionals “an economic priority for us”. It commits to removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated new Canadians. It places an emphasis on reforming occupational regulatory bodies to “accelerate the entry of qualified new Canadians”. If elected, the party plans to spend approximately $20 million over four years to make successful pilot bridging programs (where immigrants gain Canadian upgrading experience) a permanent part of the existing system.

The New Democratic Party platform states that “foreign-trained workers who lack Canadian credentials would be helped to work in their chosen trades and professions with comprehensive Access to Professions and Trades policies.”

It is in the medical field that each of the three political parties become more specific about their solutions. Excerpts from party statements are highlighted below.

**PC:** “To improve access to doctors, your government will increase the number of international medical graduates training to practise in Ontario by 20 per cent.”

**Liberal:** “We will remove barriers preventing well-qualified foreign-trained physicians from practicing in Ontario. Nearly one million Ontarians do not have a doctor. Meanwhile, we have more than 1,000 foreign-trained physicians waiting to be licensed. We will help our newly arrived doctors to meet Ontario standards and give them the opportunity to practice medicine here, where we need them.”

**NDP:** “Streamlining the training and accreditation of qualified foreign trained physicians makes good sense—not only because many areas of the province are suffering an acute shortage but also because it’s the right thing to do.”

Despite increased talk about quickly integrating immigrant skills into the economy, public funds committed to this task are relatively small. While the 2003 federal budget allocating $13 million specifically toward foreign credential recognition is a step in the right direction, it is minimal and only addresses one part of the problem. Bureaucrats working in the field point out that the resources allocated to address this issue are insufficient. As it presently stands, the rhetoric for change is outweighing financial commitment and political will.

Perhaps the most thoughtful and comprehensive solution to integrate the skills of immigrants into the Canadian economy was recently offered by the Maytree Foundation. Here is an excerpt:
“Solutions [should] be designed as part of an overall system instead of the current ad hoc approach. Incentives should be put into place so that all players collaborate in the design, delivery and evaluation of effective programs and services. Rather than making skilled immigrants ‘start from scratch’, the system would value and recognize their qualifications, focussing on ways to fill quickly any identified gaps.”

What about Grand Erie?

The provincial trend of not making good use of immigrant skills prompted us to find out how our community fares. Our survey of 51 recent immigrants to Grand Erie shed some light on this issue. The bottom line: the provincial trend of under-utilizing immigrant skills is echoed in our own community.

Consider the facts. All respondents were of a prime working age (25 to 44 years) and 67% had completed at least one university degree. Yet:

- 51% were unemployed.
- Of those employed, 71% worked full-time; most of these had positions entirely unrelated to their educational background.
- 84% of skilled professionals experienced difficulties in trying to find Canadian work in the field for which they had been educated.
- Of those employed, as many as 83% had jobs entirely unrelated, or only somewhat related, to their education.

Next, consider the employment situation of the 13 people with training and/or experience in the professions identified as being in demand in Grand Erie. Over half of these immigrants had completed their Bachelors, and 15% had completed either a Masters or Doctoral degree prior to coming to Canada. Yet:

- None of these respondents was currently working in their professional field.
- These individuals were either unemployed (77%) or working in a different profession (23%).
- As many as 33% of those employed were working part time.
- 77% stated that they had encountered difficulties in locating Canadian work in their field, even though their training matched jobs identified as in demand in the Grand Erie.
- Top reasons thought to prevent them from finding relevant work included: a lack of Canadian experience, a lack of licensing, previous work experience and accreditation going unrecognized in Canada, and difficulties with English.
- Over half (54%) had had their English assessed, and 46% had or were currently receiving additional training, including ESL classes.

Based on these survey results, it is clear that many new immigrants to
Grand Erie are bringing with them needed skills. It is also clear that these skills are not being fully used. Despite additional training and classes, none of the 13 people having training in the professions identified as being in demand had found work in their profession. To date, their skills have been under-used.

Why is this Still a Problem?

The obvious questions need to be asked: Why has substantial change been so slow in coming? If it is common sense to make use of immigrant skills, what is stopping this from happening?

The Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT) has asked these questions in earnest. This province-wide group is made up of associations of internationally educated professionals that propose credible policy recommendations on access to professions and trades. It has identified five underlying reasons for the slow pace of change:

Lack of policy coherence among levels of government: Immigrants often fall through the cracks of various governmental jurisdictions and departments, with duplication of services in some areas and gaps in others. Prior to immigration, accurate information about Canada needed to make informed decisions is often lacking. In Ontario, the province does not have a comprehensive settlement strategy to integrate immigrants. It is also the only province that has not negotiated a Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) with the federal government that would provide a needed framework for funding and delivery of employment programs.

Lack of accountability mechanisms: There is minimal public accountability of the key stakeholders who influence the lives of immigrant professionals. Government needs to be more accountable within and across jurisdictions and to the public. While legislated into existence by the provincial government to protect public safety, occupational regulatory bodies have in fact been held minimally accountable to the government. More specifically, accountability is lacking in how these bodies assess individuals educated outside of Canada. There are also no accountability mechanisms to ensure that employers make hiring decisions that are free from bias based on place of education.

Negative attitudes of Canadian society: Negative attitudes and myths about immigrants and their skills exist within our society. These attitudes influence immigrant lives in many ways, from subtle acts to overt discrimination.

Negative attitudes and practices of regulators: Negative attitudes about immigrants and their qualifications exist within the various occupational regulatory bodies. Many bodies do not give reasons why a license is denied and do not have an appeals process. Numerous barriers within the licensing procedures have been identified (e.g., lack of prior learning assessment tools, high cost of testing, few internship positions available, etc.). Barriers may not
have been created intentionally, but result when regulation is based on one type of educational system.

**Negative attitudes and practices of employers:** Immigrants face many documented barriers in integrating into the work force. Negative employer attitudes towards immigrants and people of colour have been found to impact on hiring decisions and career performance. Negative attitudes fall on a continuum from ignorance to more overt forms of racism. Employer requirements of Canadian work experience are frequently a barrier for those immigrants unable to be accredited in their professions. 45

**What Should We Do?**

By not making use of immigrant skills, individual immigrants and their families lose. So does our community as a whole. As a country and as a region, we face a choice as to how we will respond. While there are many positive steps that we can take, we would like to suggest two simple responses. The last two sections of this report will help you to respond in these ways.

**Listen.** Listen to the experiences of immigrants who are trying to make use of their skills, and others (like employers and service providers) who are trying to support them. Listen to the voices of success and struggle. Read the section entitled *Putting a Human Face to the Issue* to hear the stories of immigrants living in your community.

**Speak Up.** Add your own voice to the growing chorus of voices calling for change. Make the point that we need immigrants. We in fact have them. So let’s get on with it, and use them—for everyone’s benefit. Read the section entitled *Adding Our Voice* for more details about how you can speak up.
Putting a Human Face on the Issue

The statistics we presented above speak volumes. The opinions of national and local leaders we quoted are noteworthy. But, we also invite you to listen to the stories of internationally educated people and the people who support them in finding meaningful work.

In this section we highlight three local stories. They were carefully selected to give you insight into the successes and struggles experienced by your neighbours. Each is a story of an immigrant, or groups of immigrants, whose desire is to make use of their skills to strengthen Grand Erie.

Transportation Industries Make Use of Immigrant Skills

Based in Caledonia, Kim Richardson Transportation Specialists (KRTS) is a business that offers instruction and training in the operation of transport trucks. KRTS is not only successful in training many internationally educated individuals, but also supports them in finding employment. Such support is particularly important for the internationally educated, as obtaining meaningful employment in Canada often proves difficult. Willy, a KRTS instructor, and Frank, a current student, recently shared their challenges in finding employment in their field of expertise, as well as their positive experiences with KRTS.

Willy, a native of Hungary, has lived in Canada for the past twenty-three years, and has been an instructor at KRTS for many of those years. As a newcomer to Canada, Willy encountered the same obstacles that many internationally educated are now: being told that his academic credentials and previous work experience would not be recognized by Canadian regulatory bodies. He explains the impact this had on his life:

“When I came to Canada I was a little bit blue because when I got here they said I had to go back to college, because they would not accept my computer training, and I needed a mechanical license, so I wasn’t happy with that. Especially when you’ve already done all that and you know everything about that, and you have to go back again. But that’s alright …My knowledge is what I can give to the students.”

Discouraged, but not defeated, Willy called upon his skill, knowledge and experience of the trucking business to find alternative work with KRTS. A smile illuminates his face as he speaks of the joys and challenges of working as an instructor at KRTS. Proud of his work, and the company, Willy says that "we do not open the
“door and let you leave without a job.”

His friendly nature, trucking expertise and knowledge of four languages makes Willy an asset to KRTS, which attracts many internationally educated individuals. His multiple languages allow for a greater exchange of information in the classroom, and are valuable in promoting better knowledge acquisition through the use of languages other than English. Additionally, Willy’s experiences as a newcomer allow him to serve as a valuable source of social support for those encountering similar new, challenging, and sometimes frustrating situations.

Frank immigrated to Canada nearly seven years ago. In Hungary, his native country, he attended and graduated from university with a degree in automotive engineering. As the information technology industry was economically viable at that time, Frank taught himself the skills of a computer technician and worked in the information technology (IT) industry for several years. Upon arrival in Canada, however, he also found that his credentials were not recognized and he was unable to work in his field. Determined to find meaningful employment, Frank decided to return to college. There he completed an advanced ESL course, an entrance course, and an IT program. After working several years in a computer-related capacity, Frank came to realize that the economic opportunities in the information industry were gradually becoming more conservative. He therefore proceeded to explore the different employment opportunities available to him, particularly within the transportation industry.

As he sees it, the knowledge and practical skills he has acquired through the KRTS program will allow him to bridge the gap between his previous exposure to both mechanical engineering and information technology. “It is a good match having a truck license and doing trucking, and later on shifting somewhere in the transportation business.” It is apparent that despite having encountered barriers to employment that altered his career path, Frank is determined to find meaningful, pertinent work opportunities.

Frank also expresses his concerns regarding the obstacles and barriers that many internationally educated individuals continue to face:

“The whole attitude or way of thinking was completely different in Canada than on the other side of the world. It is changing slowly…it is getting better. When I came over, I wanted to utilize my degree. They said, 'no way, you have to take the whole university again.' Nowadays, they say 'okay, we can accept 3 years of university.' So it is changing. It is getting better, but we need a little bit more than they accept for East Europe. Eastern Europe has really strong, really solid education. But they didn’t know anything about Eastern Europe 20 years ago because that was the other side of the Iron Curtain.”

The trucking program offered through KRTS, consisting of both in-class instruction and practical training, takes about 6 weeks to
complete. The employment rate upon completion of the program is very high, perhaps in part because the staff at KRTS help their students look for the best fit between company and student. Willy says: “we do not ...say ‘see you,’ and take the money.” Rather, KRTS is in contact with eight or nine preferred carriers that regularly hire their students. Moreover, KRTS regularly organizes and hosts job fair forums, in which companies are invited to present information about their businesses and communicate with students regarding their operation and employment opportunities. Frank, for instance, has already been hired by Schneider National, and will begin work once he passes the Ministry of Ontario road test.

Frank considers the expense of tuition certainly a worthwhile investment. “This driving school has a good reputation. Even though it is one of the most expensive driving schools in the area, but that kind of help finding a job, and performing a job properly, makes this school more affordable in the long-term. It is a bigger investment, but it will surely come back later on.”

As an internationally educated individual, Frank believes that he, along with many other newcomers to Canada, have much to offer their new country. “I’ve brought over a different kind of idea, doing something differently, and my colleagues have said, ‘wow, that is good, how can I do that?’ and I’ve showed them, and they take over that knowledge and follow that. That type of information change could bring more opportunity.”

“Do It Now: You become successful the moment you start moving towards a worthwhile goal.” This message appears on one of several motivational posters found at the KRTS headquarters. It can clearly reflect the success of both students and the company resulting from an investment in supporting and training the internationally educated. Given the motivation, drive, and perseverance so clearly demonstrated by both Frank and Willy in successfully overcoming the challenges they were confronted with, this message is all the more meaningful.
The Struggles of an Internationally Educated Physician

While Brantford, and the rest of Ontario, experiences a shortage of family physicians, Dr. Ravinder Ghakal struggles alone to become registered to practise. Recounting years of disappointment, she sighs. "I don’t want to go again, further and further… This year I don’t have money or mental, physical strength to try again. Now I don’t know what to do… It is so frustrating.” Initially confident of returning to her profession as a family physician, Ravinder has almost given up all hope of obtaining her Ontario medical license.

After four years in Canada, Ravinder is all too aware of multiple barriers to employment for the internationally educated. This is despite her high qualifications: including two degrees from an Indian University, and more than 13 years practical experience in hospitals and her own family medical clinic, as well as instructing in a medical college.

Within Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) is responsible for assessing and licensing internationally educated physicians. The road to licensure is long and littered with barriers. Most notable among these barriers is the prohibitively high cost of multiple comprehensive examinations and the lack of residency positions available for those able to successfully complete these exams. Early on, Ravinder was warned of the difficulty in obtaining the required residency position. In 1999, before immigrating to Canada, she obtained the brochure from CPSO stating that ‘The government of Canada doesn’t need foreign trained physicians.’ At that time only 26 residency positions were available to internationally educated physicians. Although preferring to remain in Canada, Ravinder decided to work toward licensure in the United States. She explains:

“I didn’t know much about the system but I came to know slowly that instead of trying for Canada I can go to the United States…. because they select 3000 candidates per year. If I put same hard work into the US I thought I could get easily into the system.”

The licensure procedure in the United States is similar to Canada in that competition is tough and multiple, costly exams must be completed. Yet, the significantly higher number of residency positions appeals to many internationally educated physicians, including Ravinder whose dedication to her profession was such that she was willing to move with her entire family to the United States.

Fifteen years out of school and unfamiliar with North American exams, Ravinder decided to enroll in medical examination preparation courses. Ravinder explains that similar to many internationally
Voices for Change: Grand Erie

educated physicians, the examinations required significant preparation. “I had to re-start everything, re-study. For each exam I took 9 months studying. New graduates have things fresh in their mind but for those who have been practising it is very difficult to write these exams.” Although there are courses to help prepare her to write the Canadian exams, Ravinder stated: “I put a lot of effort but could not do the Canadian exams because I would also have to pay. I thought I would go one route because I am spending a lot, you see.”

In addition to the high cost of preparation courses, Ravinder also paid to travel to the United States and write each exam. Having invested more than $15,000, and immeasurable amounts of time and energy, Ravinder was pleased to pass each exam with good grades. In December 2001 she received her certification and could proceed to the next step: applying for a residency position. Although her high qualifications lead to four interviews, tough competition meant that Ravinder was not successful in obtaining a residency position. “My god, I spent for interviews also. Going and coming back.” Ravinder feels as if the events of September 11, 2001 may have worked against her when applying for a US residency position. Her difficulty in obtaining the required visa, along with decreasing travel funds and waning hope, led to Ravinder’s decision to work toward licensure in Canada. She proceeded to write, and pass, her evaluating exam.

“So I told them that I am applying and they specifically told me that if you are in remote areas then you have more chance to get selected… and if you have worked within the last three years you have still more chance.” After writing her evaluation exam, Ravinder applied to various provinces for a residency position. In Newfoundland, her application was rejected. Upon inquiry, she was told “if you want to get the reason why you are rejected you pay $100 more. Terrible.”

Under the new scheme in January 2002, Ravinder applied for a family physician residency in Ontario and was informed that her academic credentials from India were insufficient to practise in Canada. She was told that she would be unable to become licensed in Canada without her MD. “I told them in Brantford area there is no family physician and many people are begging for that. Yet, they rejected my application. They told me because it was because I have no MD from India. But we don’t have MD for family physicians in India: we study for 5 years, then we do one-year residency and then we start family practice. If you want to specialize then we have MD, but for family physicians we don’t have MD, even now we don’t have MD. I don’t know what they meant. But in other ways, all other criteria matched.”

While confident that her credentials will eventually be recognized, Ravinder is worried that time is running out. She knows that residency positions are more likely to be awarded to those who have practised within the past 3 years. Ravinder has already been out of
practise for four years. “Here, they want me to write other exams and it will take 1-2 years. After that they will probably tell me because you don’t have recent hospital experience, we will not select.”

Ravinder wishes that she had someone to provide her with guidance. Right now she relies for information on the website of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. “Now, I don’t know what to do. There is nobody I can ask for advice. We have to go through all the exams, apply for a residency position and wait.”

After endless disappointments, Ravinder is finding it hard to further invest her time, energy and money into becoming licensed. “How much can one person go and spend? If it is free to apply at any time then I will apply.” Ravinder now feels that the only factor that might motivate her to continue to struggle toward licensure is an assurance of a residency position. “If they give me some kind of residency here then I have the confidence to go for further exams… they don’t give here. You have to go through the exams first.”

Currently, all applicants must have completed the initial Medical Council of Canada Evaluation examination and the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examinations: Parts 1 & 2 prior to applying for a residency position. Those who are able to make the investments and manage to navigate their way through this obstacle course are still not guaranteed a residency position. Internationally educated physicians must compete for the few residency positions available after Canadian medical graduates have been placed.

Ravinder recently learned that even volunteer positions are difficult to obtain for internationally educated physicians. Wanting to maintain some of her clinical skills, Ravinder volunteered for an observership position at a General Hospital. This position increased her understanding of medical systems in Canadian hospitals. Unfortunately, the limited number of such opportunities resulted in only a very short-term position for Ravinder.

Ravinder feels that the number of internships and residencies will have to increase in response to internationally educated individuals. She states that the “government needs to bring about some programs like 'Physician Assistant' who upon successful completion could be offered residency position… for those who invest the time and money in doing their exams.” Long recognized as a barrier to licensure for internationally educated physicians, the Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (AIPSO), a non-profit, independent professional association representing internationally educated physicians and surgeons, also advocates for an increased number of residency positions.

Having almost given up hope of practising as a family physician in Canada, Ravinder has considered returning to India where she could work as a physician. Yet, she recognizes that moving back to India would be “hard to do... If I want to go, I have to go alone... and leave
Voices for Change: Grand Erie

the kids and the husband here. But it is very tough. If I go there, they will lose mental support. I don’t know what to do.” Ravinder and her family will have to struggle with some very difficult decisions within the next few years.

The obstacles to registration for internationally educated physicians not only affect the individual physician and their family but also impact the larger community. Practising physicians are often overworked and burnt out. This may increase their margin of error. Additionally, those without a family physician often neglect to seek medical attention or wait long hours in emergency rooms or walk-in clinics. These facilities are inadequate substitutes for family doctors who know their patients’ histories. Ravinder states: “The community doesn’t have family physicians and they are always requiring family physicians. They are losing. When they have doctors here with so much qualification and experience, what is the use? They are losing doctors…Some people have to go to London or Hamilton for a family physician – what will happen in an emergency?”

Assisting the many internationally educated physicians to become registered to practise in Ontario could do much to ease the physician shortage, lower the high burnout rates among practising physicians, increase quality of patient care and the long-term health of the community. This can only occur as a result of changes to the system of registration to make it more coherent, equitable, effective and accountable. The solution to Ontario’s physician shortage is right before our eyes in dedicated, experienced and passionate physicians like Ravinder.

“There are so many doctors like me… instead they are bringing, stealing, doctors from outside Ontario! When you have resources here the government should make use of them.”
An Internationally Educated Teacher Strives to Become Certified

A pensive expression crosses his face as Reshat Ago, an Albanian-educated teacher, describes what it means to be a teacher. “A teacher is an artist. To teach students is an art and in this art the first stage is the word.” Reshat takes seriously not only the importance of “the word”, or language, but also education itself. For this reason, three years after arrival in Canada, Reshat continues to strive toward teacher certification.

With 17 years experience as a high school chemistry and biology teacher, as well as 4 years as the Director of Education, Reshat has dedicated his life to teaching. He dreams of sharing his vast experience and knowledge in Canada but knows that doing so requires a great deal of hard work and perseverance.

Within Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) is responsible for assessing internationally educated teachers. One of the first steps on the journey to certification is developing English language proficiency. Reshat, and other internationally educated teachers, must pass oral and written language tests with high scores.

This is not an easy task. Although Reshat got an early start with two years of private language lessons in Albania, he just recently felt adequately prepared to take the first required English examination. While fluent enough to communicate and obtain employment as an operator with a technical company, Reshat feels that teaching requires a different kind of language. He says you must ask yourself “are you interesting and are you explaining as beautiful as this thing, this subject in class?”

Reshat explains that for engineers or some other professions, there is a specific vocabulary which is essential in their occupation. “I think it is much easier than for a teacher [because] teachers must be poetic… A teacher has to be an artist.”

His passion for education is what motivates Reshat to continue his daily struggle toward proficiency in English and eventual certification as a teacher in Ontario. For three years, Reshat has taken “every opportunity to work here because I know that integration takes time…it is not easy…it takes time, efforts and practice.”

And Reshat has invested a great deal of time and effort in developing fluency in English: he reads, studies language texts, speaks with church friends and colleagues, watches television programs, and works in an English-speaking environment. “Talk is the only way. We have to practise all the time.”

While aware that a teaching certificate is not needed to apply for a position within private education, Reshat is committed to reaching his goal of English proficiency and obtaining his teaching certificate.
“The first thing in my opinion is to be good in this first step... it is a great motive that I must work in English. Maybe this can take a long time but it is better and better... Even if I cannot reach my goal, it is my motive to speak good English.”

Evidence of proficiency in English is just the first of numerous steps required by the OCT to become certified to teach in Ontario. Among other documents, the OCT requires evidence of at least one year professional training with five full courses and the completion of an undergraduate degree meeting the College’s requirements.

Although Reshat has not yet submitted his documents for evaluation by the OCT, he remains optimistic that things will proceed. While aware that many internationally educated teachers experience difficulty in obtaining these official documents, he feels certain that his many friends and family in Albania can assist with this endeavor. He is also confident that his credentials will be recognized and positively evaluated.

Unfortunately, not all internationally educated teachers have credentials that meet the OCT’s requirements. Applicants whose degree does not meet the requirements will not be certified to teach in Ontario. While those with more than half the required courses may be able to fill the specific gaps, others will have to complete an Ontario Faculty of Education Program or participate in the recently established alternative accreditation program at Queens University in Kingston.

This program, spearheaded by the Access to Professions and Trades Unit of the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, is a pilot project established in response to the difficulties experienced by some internationally educated teachers. While providing an alternative to the completion of an entire Ontario Faculty of Education program, the location and limited number of available spaces may be problematic for many internationally educated teachers.

Reshat believes that more effort should be taken to assist internationally educated teachers in preparing to teach in Canada. In addition to the linguistic differences, he says, there are differences in the methodology and philosophy of teaching.

“In Albania teachers are very strict. Here, things are very different. Teachers here are very familiar with students and talking openly in a different way. This is one thing I like.”

Reshat has become aware of these differences informally: through interaction with his children’s teachers and through exposure to the media. He believes that learning about differences in teaching styles and methods is essential for those internationally educated teachers hoping to teach in Ontario. While Reshat has not received any formal support in preparing for his certification, he believes that someone should help prepare internationally educated teachers.

Similarly, in early 2003 the Toronto Think Tank on Internationally
Educated Teachers recognized that success depends, in part, on providing mentorship, or involvement with people who know the system. The Think Tank recommends that “a support structure must be developed where someone can guide the person to reaching his goal at each point in the process and assist in overcoming obstacles.”

Reshat modestly states, “I cannot pretend that I know what exactly is the best way that I can be more successful.” He suggests that while difficult, internationally educated teachers may benefit from a position within the schools.

“I think there are opportunities for newcomer teachers to enter as a

volunteer teacher but there is a problem in this point because I need to work. I need to pay rent, insurance for my car, other things for my family.”

Given the shortage of teachers throughout Ontario, and the prediction that 60% of Ontario’s teachers will retire within the next 10 years, investing energy and funds in assisting internationally educated teachers to become certified in Ontario may be wise. The solution to the teacher shortage is right before our eyes. We all win when dedicated, passionate, and experienced teachers like Reshat are enabled to contribute their skills and knowledge.
Adding Our Voice…
A Local Call for Change

As Grand Erie diversifies, its strength and prosperity will increasingly depend on immigrants’ skills. Citizens of Grand Erie and their leaders are invited to join the call for the better use of these skills brought by local immigrants.

Below are specific calls for change. These calls were developed by our project’s steering committee with input from experts in the field.

People within Grand Erie are endorsing these calls for change. Visit www.crehs.on.ca to add your name to the growing list of leaders and other Grand Erie citizens who have already endorsed these calls.

Summary of Grand Erie Calls for Change
Preamble: Whereas Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on:

Federal Government:
• The federal government to demonstrate increased leadership toward removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated persons.

Provincial Government:
• The provincial government to demonstrate increased leadership toward removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated persons.

Regulatory Bodies:
• All occupational regulatory bodies to improve their standards of practice by ensuring licensing processes for internationally educated professionals are fair, timely, transparent and consistent.

Employers:
• Local employers to increasingly recognize the skills that immigrants bring to Grand Erie through fair hiring practices and internship opportunities.

Educational Institutions:
• Post-secondary educational institutions across Ontario to demonstrate increased leadership in recognizing the prior learning of internationally educated persons and responding to their educational and training upgrading needs.
**Grand Erie Calls for Change and Corresponding Actions for Implementation**

**Federal Government**

*Whereas Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on the federal government to demonstrate increased leadership toward removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated persons.*

Immediate action is needed to implement change and should include:

**Action #1:** The federal government ensure better policy coherence, as it relates to the access to professions and trades for internationally educated people, within and between government jurisdictions.

**Action #2:** The federal government provide leadership in promoting positive attitudes towards immigrants and people of colour.

**Action #3:** The federal government develop a pre-immigration strategy that would provide accurate information about Canada needed for immigrants to make informed decisions.

**Action #4:** The federal government negotiate an agreement with the provincial government to better coordinate the funding and delivery of employment assistance and training programs for immigrants.

**Action #5:** The federal government provide additional resources to promote access to professions and trades, including funding organizations representing internationally educated professionals that would enable them to propose effective and equitable systems towards the integration of immigrants into their professions.

**Action #6:** The federal government establish and provide resources for employment preparation services for immigrants within Grand Erie.

**Action #7:** The federal government increase funding for Language Instruction for New Canadian (LINC) programs for immigrants and refugees.
Provincial Government

Whereas the Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on the provincial government to demonstrate increased leadership toward removing barriers to professions and trades for internationally educated persons.

Immediate action is needed to implement change and should include:

Action #1: The provincial government ensure better policy coherence, as it relates to the access to professions and trades for internationally educated people, within and between government jurisdictions.

Action #2: The provincial government have a greater role in developing a comprehensive settlement strategy, which will assure that any federal funding committed at that time would be dedicated to settlement needs.

Action #3: The provincial government negotiate an agreement with the federal government to better coordinate the funding and delivery of employment and training programs for immigrants.

Action #4: The provincial government integrate the successful pilot “Bridging Programs” (programs that help integrate skilled immigrants in specific professions and trades into the labour market) into existing service delivery models to ensure increased access.

Action #5: The provincial government develop standards of practice for regulatory bodies that would ensure that their licensing processes are fair, timely, transparent and consistent; with annual reporting on compliance of these standards and non-compliance mechanisms put into place.

Action #6: The provincial government provide additional resources for occupational regulatory bodies, post secondary educational institutions and organizations representing internationally educated professionals that would enable them to develop effective and equitable systems towards the integration of immigrants into their professions.

Action #7: The provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Ministry of Attorney General, and Ministry of Education move quickly to implement Actions #4-5, as health-related professionals, engineering technicians/technologists, and teachers are the professions needed most urgently in Grand Erie.

Action #8: The provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care increase substantially the annual number of spaces for International Medical Graduates.

Action #9: The provincial government increase funding for English as a second language programs for immigrants and refugees.
Regulatory Bodies

Whereas Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on all occupational regulatory bodies to improve their standards of practice by ensuring licensing processes for internationally educated professionals are fair, timely, transparent and consistent.

Immediate action is needed to implement change and should include:

Action #1: All 38 occupational regulatory bodies consult with associations representing internationally educated professionals to develop standards of practice that ensure licensing processes are fair, timely, transparent and consistent.¹

Action #2: All 38 occupational regulatory bodies provide public reports outlining the number of applications for license by internationally educated professionals, and the number of licenses actually issued to internationally educated professionals.

Action #3: All 38 occupational regulatory bodies provide public reports of where internationally educated applicants reached an impasse in the process of licensure, and why the impasse was reached.

Action #4: All 38 occupational regulatory bodies undertake licensing reviews to identify any potential barriers that exist in their licensing procedures.

Action #5: The 22 health-related regulatory bodies, the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists, and the Ontario College of Teachers move quickly to implement Actions #1-3 as health-related professionals, engineering technicians/technologists, and teachers are the professions needed most urgently in Grand Erie.

Action #6: The Ontario College of Teachers act on the recent resolution of the provincial school board trustee association (OPSBA) towards streamlining and expediting the approval of qualified foreign trained credentials.

¹ The 38 regulatory bodies include: Ontario Association of Architects; Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario; Law Society of Upper Canada; Certified General Accountants of Ontario; Certified Management Accountants of Ontario; Chartered Accountants of Ontario; Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists; Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists; Chiropodists of Ontario; Chiropractors of Ontario; Dental Hygienists of Ontario; Dental Surgeons of Ontario; Dental Technologists of Ontario; Denturists of Ontario; Dietitians of Ontario; Medical Laboratory Technologists; Massage Therapists of Ontario; Midwives; Drugless Therapy Naturopathy; College of Nurses of Ontario; Occupational Therapists of Ontario; Opticians of Ontario; Optometrists of Ontario; Physiotherapists of Ontario; Registered Insurance Brokers of Ontario; Ontario College of Pharmacists; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; Psychologists of Ontario; Respiratory Therapists of Ontario; Ontario College of Teachers; Veterinarians of Ontario; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; College of Pharmacists; College of Nurses of Ontario; College of Teachers; Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers; Board of Funeral Services; Real Estate Council of Ontario; Association of Ontario Land Surveyors; Ontario Professional Foresters' Association; Geoscientists of Ontario
Employers

Whereas Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on local employers to recognize the skills that immigrants bring to Grand Erie through fair hiring practices and internship opportunities.

Immediate action is needed to implement change and should include:

Action #1: Local employers participate in co-op placement, mentorship/internship, and apprenticeship arrangements to provide skilled immigrants with opportunities to gain knowledge of Canadian workplace practices.

Action #2: Local employers ensure that their hiring procedures are free from bias.

Action #3: Local employers ensure that openness to diversity become part of their corporate culture.

Educational Institutions

- Whereas Grand Erie welcomes, and is increasingly dependent on, the skills brought by immigrants, citizens, employers and leaders of our region call on post-secondary educational institutions across Ontario to demonstrate increased leadership in recognizing the prior learning of internationally educated persons and responding to their educational and training upgrading needs.

Immediate action is needed to implement change and should include:

Action #1: Post-secondary educational institutions recognize and adequately assess the prior learning of internationally educated persons.

Action #2: Post-secondary educational institutions consult immigrant services and other educational institutions across Canada in developing suitable individual academic courses to fill identified gaps for internationally educated professionals and tradespeople, without requiring them to take a full diploma or degree program.

Action #3: Post-secondary educational institutions pursue the development of adequate English as a second language programs.

Action #4: Faculties of Medicine increase substantially the annual number of spaces for International Medical Graduates (IMG).
Conclusion

Today we have an opportunity to plan for the future health of Grand Erie. We have an opportunity to join with others from across the country in calling for immigrant skills to be better used as a means of strengthening our community.

If you would like to join others in the region of Grand Erie in endorsing the Calls for Change listed above, please visit www.crehs.on.ca. There you can add your name to the growing list of leaders and other Grand Erie citizens who have already endorsed these calls.

This document, and the endorsements, will be sent to provincial and federal cabinet ministers and their ministry staff persons who have responsibility in promoting access to professions and trades for immigrants. They will also be sent to the various occupational regulatory bodies across the province.

Our intention is that our local voices for change, combined with those across the country, will speed up the progress in taking down the barriers immigrants face in using their skills.

Visit www.crehs.on.ca today to endorse the local Calls for Change.

Immigrant Skills...
We Need Them. We Have Them. Let’s Use Them.
Voices for Change: Grand Erie

End Notes

2 Statistics Canada. 2001 Census. All remaining demographics are from the 2001 Census, unless otherwise noted.
7 Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (2002). GETAB Environmental Scan.
9 Grand River District Health Council (2002). Primary Care Survey Results Q & A.
11 Canadian task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1998). After the door has been opened. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada.
14 Immigrants losing ground on income By Erin Anderssen and Caroline Alphonso. The Globe and Mail (Canada), March 12, 2003; Pg. A6 http://globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20030312/UNOTEN/TPNational/Canada
17 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2003). Permanent residents destined to selected community by intended occupation.
18 Survey completed April-September, 2003. Distributed through local service organizations, churches, ethnic associations, informal networks and via the web. Survey was not a random sample. Therefore results cannot be generalized to the entire recent immigrant population.
19 For more complete list see:
22 For a more complete chronology see the following two sources:
23 Reitz, J., Southam Press, April 27, 2000. “For immigrants, the trend seems to be towards exclusion form the knowledge economy.”

Thompson, A. Skilled immigrants left in lurch: Not given much help to adapt. Skills, education end up wasted. The Toronto Star, June 6, 2003.

See: http://www.competeprosper.ca/institute/index.html


Nearly half of MDs are burned out, study finds. By Mary Vallis. CanWest News Service (Canada), Tuesday September 2, 2003.


See: www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/library/thronespeech-Apr3003.asp

See: www.choosechange.ca/en/platform/2/16.cfm

See: www.publicpower.ca/our_platform/platform.html

For additional comments on party positions on foreign-trained medical professionals, see: www.ocasi.org/downloads/OCASI_Election_Issues_Poll.pdf

See: www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/library/thronespeech-Apr3003.asp


See: www.publicpower.ca/our_platform/platform.html


Some of the names have been changed to protect participants’ anonymity.