



HUMAN SERVICES PLANNING COALITION

Inclusivity Action Plan Blue Sky Retreat Report

December 14, 2007

The Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) adopted the Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP) in 2005, and appointed the Inclusivity Action Plan Steering Committee to guide and direct the implementation of IAP. Over 80 individuals from 40 human service organizations diligently worked together in the past two years. Six working groups concentrated on developing solutions for six challenging areas arising from ethno-cultural diversity and building a more ethno-cultural inclusive York Region. IAP has accomplished many goals set out two years ago and is approaching a completion phase by the end of 2007.

On November 28, 2007, a Blue Sky Retreat was held at the Richmond Hill Golf Club that celebrated IAP achievements, discussed challenges and considered another IAP. The Retreat was well attended by over 55 participants including the Co-Chairs of the HSPC, Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio and Mr. Bill Hogarth, and the IAP Co-Chairs, Mayor Frank Scarpitti and Simon Cheng as well as range of representation from HSPC, IAP, current and potential funders, community partners and Regional staff. Group discussions focused on the objectives of the Blue Sky Retreat which included:

- Reviewing the current IAP and identify major accomplishments, success factors, challenges and tasks to be sustained.
- Discussing how to build a more inclusive York Region.
- Identifying organization and resources required for another IAP.

This IAP Blue Sky Retreat report provides a summary of the key themes that emerged from the group discussions on November 28, 2007. The purpose of the report is to capture ideas and concerns reflective to the community's need for another IAP and continued efforts for making York Region an ethno-culturally inclusive place to live, work and play. This report will be reviewed by the IAP Steering Committee and participants of the Blue Sky Retreat for further feedback. Furthermore, the Blue Sky Retreat report will be submitted as an appendix of the final IAP Report to the HSPC and Regional Council.

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of Dr. Mina Singh and Dr. Michaela Hynie, principal researchers of the IAP Program Evaluation for gathering data and notes and Mary Durante, Policy and Program Development Specialist from the Human Services Planning Branch for preparing detailed minutes of the Blue Sky Retreat.

At the Blue Sky Retreat, three group discussions formed the basis of the activity for the day. This section of the report will summarize the discussions in depth according to the following topics:

Group Discussion # 1- Overview of IAP, 2005-2007

- What are the three most significant outcomes of IAP?
- What are the three most crucial success factors?
- What are the three biggest challenges?
- What are the three activities to be sustained and for how long?

Group Discussion # 2- How to build a more inclusive York Region?

- Are there new challenges?
- If yes, what are the three new targets or tasks?

Group Discussion # 3- Organization and resources for another IAP

- What kind of organization?
- What resources are needed?

Overview of IAP, 2005-2007

Significant Outcomes of IAP

Over the past two years, the IAP has accomplished many goals set out in the original plan. The three most significant outcomes of the IAP are the creation of a comprehensive model, relationship building and development of the Welcome Centre.

The creation of a comprehensive model such as the IAP is a significant outcome of the project reflecting a collaborative community-based initiative and collective vision of making York Region an inclusive community. Through HSPC's leadership the IAP model was sponsored and activated into a project. The IAP benefited from the support of HSPC which helped to:

- Advance the model through staff secretariats;
- Build a governance structure to guide the project;
- Providing space for the community to discuss and identify the issue;
- Raise awareness of the issue;
- Develop an innovative plan to tackle barriers;
- Make York Region a more welcoming community.

In summary, the IAP model created a collaborative process of engaging the community and profiling and addressing issues related to inclusivity.

Another important outcome of IAP is the relationship building opportunities. Over the course of two years, relationships were developed amongst different levels of government, politicians, service providers, human service stakeholders and community members leading to strong partnership and

collaborative work in the area of inclusivity. The support of HSPC has been instrumental in developing trust with partners due to credibility and political involvement of the HSPC that is a valued asset to stakeholders. The IAP has established trust with stakeholders through HSPC's involvement thus leading to building relationship and securing partnerships to advance project goals and activities.

The Welcome Centre is viewed as the “crown jewel” of the IAP and the HSPC and is a prime example of achieving an ambitious goal. Two years of hard work and a dedicated team resulted in the first opening of the Welcome Centre in York Region. The Welcome Centre is a tangible form of increased visibility of IAP that demonstrates collaboration among service providers and different levels of government to provide improved system of services and resources to newcomers in York Region.

Success Factors of IAP

The three most crucial success factors of IAP are attributed to the ground up approach, creation of a safe framework and process of collaboration.

The ground up approach was an attractive feature of IAP because there was space and opportunity for the community to plan, develop and implement an initiative reflective to their needs and challenges. The willingness of the community to come together from ground up and work on common goals highlights the effect of this approach and strong community buy-in.

Further, the formation of a “safe” framework is a key success factor of IAP that increased buy-in from stakeholders including the politicians, funders and school boards. The leadership from HSPC provided resources for the framework to be creative by accessing funding opportunities from different levels of government.

Finally, The IAP model nurtured the process of collaboration that created real partnership amongst all stakeholders including community members, politicians, service providers and funders. The process of the IAP model was effective in raising awareness of inclusivity issue and developing goal oriented action plans to address these community challenges.

Challenges of IAP

The successes of the IAP did not come without challenges including securing adequate resources, key messaging and economic inclusion of newcomers.

The most challenging aspects of the IAP was resources including human resources, funding and time management. The IAP initiative had high expectations that required long-term commitment of time, human resources, and

financial support to discuss ideas, develop plans and action the work. IAP members had full time employment and other commitments that made it challenging to provide time and energy in accomplishing tasks. Due to limited resources, the project strongly depended on the volunteer time and capacity of members to deliver action items. Therefore, participants felt it is essential to have adequate on-going human resources and financial support to sustain IAP as a project, advance outstanding activities and to put programs in place.

Another significant challenge that was identified was the limited communication of the IAP in the community. Generally, IAP was perceived as a “secret” effort of community members with limited opportunities to communicate key messages of IAP. There is a need to expand IAP’s awareness and bring it to the community and general public to learn about the initiative. It is also important to raise awareness of IAP and increase dialogue within organizations and government structures to ensure the message is consistent and accessible.

An emerging challenge for IAP pertained to the economic inclusion of newcomers in the labour market. Employment was viewed as one of the important factors of a healthy and successful integration and settlement in York Region. It is recommended for IAP to engage employers about newcomer issues and develop strategies to promote healthy economic integration of immigrants.

Moving Forward

There are a number of tasks and targets that need to be implemented and sustained beyond the completion of the current IAP. The following is a list of tasks that need to be sustained:

- **Charter of Inclusivity** was developed by Working Group 6-Organizational Development and received approval from HSPC. The Charter of Inclusivity offers guiding principles for organizations and workplaces to fully become inclusive and reflective of York Region’s diversity. Organizations can apply to become Charter Members and receive support from the Circle of Champions to further enhance the organizations response to diversity and sustain inclusivity. The Charter of Inclusivity is ready to move forward and become accessible to all organizations.
- **Circle of Champions** is a program initiative developed by Working Group 6 to help change the culture of organizations to a more inclusive one. The Circle of Champions is an annually selected group of 8-10 individuals who live and/or work in York Region and who can Champion the Charter of Inclusivity. The role of the Circle of Champions is to assess organizations to become Charter Member-Organizations and to act as the public face of the IAP and promote the Charter of Inclusivity. This program requires resources and staff support to coordinate and implement project activities.

- **Employment integration of newcomers** is seen as a new field for IAP to address. Newcomers need to have meaningful employment in their professional fields as well as to be integrated in the labour market. Participants identified a disconnect between the employment sector and newcomer employment opportunities. IAP should engage employers to explore economic development activities for newcomers.
- **Continued involvement of political leadership** is a current area of IAP that needs to be sustained. The involvement and support of HSPC has contributed to the success of IAP as well as secured political buy-in on issues of diversity and inclusivity. This strong linkage and partnership with political leaders needs to be sustained beyond the current IAP.

In order to move forward with the solutions in the above identified, a number of ideas were recommended:

- Keep the HSPC as the model and sponsoring organization to engage new stakeholders, politicians and the nine municipalities;
- The IAP should continue as the umbrella project for collective action and maintenance of the working groups;
- Sustain the culture of collaboration for service providers and stakeholders to effectively address common issues and strategize integrated plans and goals;
- Work with funding bodies to secure resources for an IAP staff program unit, to implement Working Group 6 program initiative of the Circle of Champions and Charter of Inclusivity and Working Group 4 Youth Mentoring Program for newcomer high school students as well as develop an IAP website;

How to build a more inclusive York Region

The IAP began the process of making York Region a more ethno-culturally inclusive community. Since the inception of the IAP, a vision was created, goals and ideas were articulated thus resulting in the development of a work plan to build a more inclusive York Region. However, it has taken two years to finalize a comprehensive model of inclusivity. The Welcome Centre, IAP logo and branding, Charter of Inclusivity, development of an IAP model and relationship building are concrete outcomes of the current IAP. There are remaining tasks and new challenges that need to be addressed and implemented beyond the completion of the current IAP.

Based on the group discussions at the Blue Sky Retreat, there are new challenges for IAP to address including:

- Work plans of several Working Groups are not concluded therefore they should continue with their mandates.

- Financing the IAP- funding issues are prevalent and alternative sources of funding should be explored.
- Redefine and broaden the term inclusivity to expand IAP to new agencies, communities, and interested partners who have not been involved with the current IAP (seniors, Aboriginal people, youth, immigrants, women, individuals with disability, private and business sector and employers) as well as invite all nine municipalities to the IAP table.
- The IAP is still conceptual and needs to further be integrated into how we live and work in York Region.
- Measurement indicators are missing in terms of identifying whether newcomers feel welcome and integrated.
- Challenge of smaller businesses, employers and the private sector to buy-in to inclusivity.

The new set of challenges requires the following tasks to overcome barriers of IAP:

- Advance the original IAP plan to program implementation.
- Secure dedicated and professional staff to support and implement IAP.
- Strengthen outreach to engage new partners and members.
- Develop linkage with media channels and develop social marketing strategies to raise awareness of the IAP.
- Move the Charter of Inclusivity and Circle of Champions to the next level of implementation.

Organization and resources for another IAP

There was strong consensus that IAP should continue as a regional community-based project in York Region. The community values the work of IAP and expressed a need for another IAP to continue. It is imperative to complete the tasks and work plans of the current IAP and address the new challenges brought forward. The table indicates options for a structural organization and resources required to implement another IAP.

Organizational Structure	Resources
• IAP continues under the auspice of HSPC because HSPC has political clout and buy-in of stakeholders and all levels of government • IAP transforms from a plan to a program implementation • An IAP unit with a full complement of staff support of: - program manager - human resources - outreach coordinator - communication specialist • To establish a governing committee accountable to HSPC and to carry forward the work of IAP • Inclusivity becomes branding for the Region- housed by the Region but at arms length to allow for funding opportunities to be sought • To increase effort with employers, education sector and all nine municipalities • To identify and invite new stakeholders to the IAP table • To set up community access points in hospitals, schools, and employment centres to explore the work of IAP • Ombudsman link	• Increase capacity of Human Services Planning Branch to support IAP • Have dedicated resources for IAP • Have agencies with a common theme (e.g. ESL) submit joint funding applications, and engage in shared resources • To renew efforts to increase funding • To develop a website • To create a clearinghouse of what is available

The Inclusivity Action Plan Blue Sky Retreat report summarizes the small group discussions and highlights common themes of new challenges for IAP and a need to implement another IAP. The IAP Steering Committee will review the report and formulate recommendations in respect of steps to move forward. This report will be distributed to the participants of the Blue Sky Retreat, HSPC and the Regional Council.

Prepared by:

Reviewed by:

Freba Shahsamand, MSW
Program Leader,
Inclusivity Action Plan
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Simon Cheng
Program Director
Human Services Planning Branch
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