

SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PROCESS OF
REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

A Field Practicum Report
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Abstract

Canada is largely comprised of immigrants from across the world. Many of these immigrants are people who have come into Canada for safety, freedom from persecution and others, in hopes of finding better lives for themselves and their families. There are many challenges that come with the change of moving from one country to another and this report will explore these challenges; including, how Regina Open Door Society (RODS) designs programs which are tailored to assist newcomers in their settlement and integration into their new environment. Additionally while exploring these challenges, this report will explore other resources and organizations in the community that work with RODS to provide for the needs of newcomers. In this document, social work practice and theories such as the strength based perspective are discussed as they are used to empower new immigrants to realise their goals. This report will also include a reflection of the integration of social work ethics and skills used by staff at RODS to assess and work with newcomers while fulfilling the aims of the organization.

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Introduction

This practicum report is based on the experience gained as a social work practicum student at the Regina Open Door Society (RODS). The purpose of this report is to provide some critical reflection of my learning experience in the final component for the Master's degree in Social Work (MSW). The impetus for choosing this particular placement stems from my desire to build professional capacity in reaching out to newcomers like myself, and to see beyond the challenges they find all around them, so as to help them locate the possibilities both within themselves and in the community. More so, I also chose this placement in order to achieve the goal of obtaining direct social work experience at the graduate level and to enhance my social work skills. I began my practicum with the RODS in January, 2019 and finished in April, 2019. Within this specific period, I increased my knowledge of, and experience in, working with newcomers – both immigrants and refugees from countries such as Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea, just to mention a few.

My overarching goal for this Master of Social Work (MSW) field practicum was to build advanced social work knowledge and skills, geared towards elevating my practice to the MSW level. Another learning objective identified for this practicum was to gain experience in working directly with diverse immigrant families in order to develop specific skills for culturally sensitive social work practice with diverse populations. My past experience in Ghana working with people from different cultures and beliefs offered me opportunities to learn about how to deal with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, the skills of offering culturally responsive practice was put into use and further developed in my work with RODS. Another objective was to increase my knowledge about the roles of other professionals such as counsellors, life

skills services, as well as settlement and support workers in schools available for providing the settlement needs of immigrants and refugees. It was very interesting to learn how these professionals collaboratively worked to coordinate services to ensure a smooth integration of newcomers into their new home and community.

I also wanted to learn how to utilize social work theories to build knowledge and understand the various experiences of newcomers and their challenges while supporting their capacity for self-determination. After taking my first MSW class in Social Work Practice with Families in my first semester, I became particularly interested in how I would integrate the social work theories that I have learnt in class such as the strength-based and solution focused theories in my practice. I have since then looked forward to avenues where I can analyse and apply these theoretical constructs; and Regina Open Door Society offered me the right platform to put theory into practice in my day to day interactions and service delivery to clients. This agency practices from a strength-based approach in building capacity both in their community resources as well as with services for individual immigrants and families and to connect them to these resources.

Working with Regina Open Door Society during this practicum placement gave me the opportunity to enhance my skills in practicing with individuals as well as families and also in coordinating services for clients. I was able to observe the first hand impact of Regina Open Door Society programs on the lives of these newcomers which gave me absolute satisfaction and fulfilment in knowing that I was empowering and making a difference in their lives. Having been an immigrant myself, it was very easy for me to relate to and also express empathy where appropriate to the clients I was working with. In my own life here in Regina as an international student, I have personally encountered my fair share of challenging moments and as such I can

empathize with new immigrants and refugees in Canada who are currently going through the resettlement phase of their life. Once I began my practicum at the society (RODS), I became very much interested in learning more about the settlement experiences and challenges faced by immigrants and refugees who come to Canada so as to offer support. I also was exposed to the ways in which a strength-based approach is useful in equipping and providing newcomers with the tools they need to succeed in order to improve their quality of life. In this paper, the phrase “immigrant and refugee” may be used interchangeably with the term “newcomer,” and both will refer to immigrants and refugees who have been in Canada for less than five years. There are times where the term “immigrants and refugees” may be used in their own context but, when needed, clarification will be made to differentiate between the two terms.

The Background of the Agency

The Regina Open Door Society (RODS) is a non-profit community based organization established in 1976 by concerned members of the community who wanted to see settlement and integration services for refugees and immigrants. RODS has grown along with its commitment to provide client-centered, strength-based services and support along the continuum of the arduous settlement experience (Dietrich, 2008). As the lone refugee and immigrant settlement agency within the City of Regina, RODS provides a broad range of services to a highly diverse clientele including refugees seeking haven from war and persecution as well as all other classes of immigrants, such as economic class immigrants and immigrants under family sponsorship. The core client group of RODS consists of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) who come to Regina through the coordinated efforts of the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR), Citizenship and Immigration

Canada (CIC), and also through the efforts of private sponsoring groups such as churches and families.

Regina Open Door Society (RODS) is committed to meeting the needs of newcomers by offering specific programs and services that empower them to achieve their goals of finding meaningful employment to provide for their families in order to fully participate in the larger community in which they live. This mission of RODS is achieved by providing supports and needed services, such as initial resettlement needs like finding accommodation, life skills and school placement for immigrants and refugees and their families in Regina. As an organization, RODS also has the vision of providing a welcoming community, enriched with diversity and strengths for newcomers to Regina. The following values are upheld in the day to day interaction with clients as well as in the operations of RODS:

Diversity

We value diversity, whereby individuals from different cultures and backgrounds work together to strengthen our communities and workplaces, exchanging fresh ideas and perspectives and generating new energy.

Respect & Dignity

We value respect and dignity, whereby we demonstrate fairness, consistency, inclusiveness, honesty and compassion as we support each other to discover, learn and achieve our goals.

Service Excellence

We value service excellence, whereby each of us is committed to professional, accountable, adaptable, caring and compassionate service to all our clients, colleagues, volunteers and community.

Partnership & Collaboration

We value partnership and collaboration, whereby we build mutually beneficial relationships where we can share responsibilities and ideas and work together to enhance opportunities for all (RODS, 2019b).

By reviewing these values, I found that, they are all in alignment with the values stipulated in the Canadian Association of Social Workers code of ethics (2005) which affirms the Agency's commitment to serving immigrants and refugees as well as advocating for their rights.

Partner Organizations

Under collaboration and partnership, RODS has both internal and external resources within the community that they work very closely with to provide services in meeting the needs of newcomers. Catholic Family Services (CFS), the KidsFirst Program, Regina Community Clinic (RCC), Language Assessment and Referral Center (LARC) and Public Healthcare under the Saskatchewan Health Authority are some of the major collaborative organizations that partner with RODS in the provision of services. All these partners tackle an aspect of the settlement and integration process that may present as a challenge by providing services that will address the needs of clients.

Catholic Family Services (CFS)

A very good external partner of RODS is the Catholic Family Service (CFS). Just as RODS, CFS is also funded by IRCC. CFS plays a very vital role in helping immigrants to settle in their community by offering two major services:

- 1) Newcomer career services: the career services for newcomers provide programs tailored to meet the needs of newcomers ready to enter the workforce. It is the most popular service provided as finding a job in Regina

can be very problematic and the CFS helps newcomers to navigate through the system by assisting in the following:

- Development of a career action plan
- Personality assessment tools
- Cover letter and resume development
- Job search strategies
- Job coaching
- One-to one career counselling
- Interview process
- Ongoing support and guidance
- Employment leverage

2) Family Support Services: this program offers newcomers' family crisis counselling, group learning experiences, and in-home visits. This program helps families with complex needs and helps to identify their strengths and build on them by:

- assisting parents to develop effective management skills so they can parent their children in a more positive and healthy manner
- teaching daily living skills and personal wellness in a Canadian cultural context
- reducing destructive behaviours in families and strengthening the parent child attachment
- reducing isolation and increasing involvement in community life
- connecting parents with community resources (Catholic Family Services [CFS], 2018).

KidsFirst Program

KidsFirst is a free, optional program that helps families to become the best parents they can be by enhancing knowledge, providing support and building on family strengths. The whole journey of relocating and settling into a different country can be very overwhelming, in addition to the added challenge of going through a pregnancy or having to raise kids in a new environment, often without family support. Regina Open Door Society KidsFirst program is designed to step in to help with the needed adjustments through this process. The purpose of KidsFirst is to support newcomer families as they bring a new baby into their life. This purpose is achieved by the program sending home visitors to support families in their homes to build the life they want for themselves. Women who are pregnant or who have children one year or younger can be registered if needing service or meet criteria and wish to be in the program, since this program is voluntary. If also needed, families can also stay in the program until the primary child is three years old (Regina Open Door Society [RODS], 2019).

I had the privilege of conducting a parent survey for the KidsFirst program in March, 2019 during my practicum. The aim of this survey was to evaluate the overall service provided by the home visitors and to find out if the program was meeting the goals of enhancing parenting knowledge, providing support and building on family strengths; all of which are key to the KidsFirst Program. To sum up the outcome of the survey, it is worth mentioning that the KidsFirst program is reaching out to families in their home and within the community through organizing programs. Families benefit greatly from the supports and services provided before and after the birth of a baby. Based on my interviews, the supports received from the program are immeasurably helpful and the program is actually making a difference in the lives of

parents, especially first time mothers as well as immigrants and refugees who might not have any form of family support here in Regina. If any conclusion may be drawn from the data collected, it could perhaps be that families enrolled in the KidsFirst program are well equipped with information and support they need to provide effective care for themselves and their babies.

Regina Community Clinic (RCC)

The Regina Community Clinic is an all-in-one clinic with a laboratory and X-ray services as well as a Pharmacy. These services make it very convenient for healthcare services to be accessed under one roof for new refugees and immigrants who are learning their way around the city. RODS has built a very strong partnership with the RCC and it has tended to be the only clinic that newcomers go to for their first medical checkup or doctor's appointment. For one year, the community clinic will continue to provide health care services to newcomers until such a time that they are very familiar with their new environment. In addition to this, the community clinic is equipped with doctors from diverse backgrounds who can speak other languages in addition to English, which helps in offering culturally responsive services. When a doctor is able to speak the language of a newcomer refugee, both the doctor and the newcomer are able to communicate confidentially without the use of interpreters and the doctor will better understand the client's needs.

Almost all refugees are given the Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage on arrival at the airport. The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), as the name suggests, is the interim health coverage a refugee (or a protected group) has until such a time that they become eligible for provincial or territorial health insurance (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2017). Under this program, services are provided by health professionals, the cost of services from IFHP-

registered health-care providers are covered (doctors, dentists, hospitals, pharmacies), and some medications are also covered if they are eligible. The health care needs of a refugee are fully provided for under this program and, as a result, those with refugee status will not have to pay for any services received in the clinic.

During my practicum, I had the chance to support a newcomer family by taking them to the RCC to have their initial medical checks done guiding them through the process of registering and giving them a tour of the facility. Clients are assisted in the initial appointment to the clinic so that they are well equipped and empowered to handle the subsequent appointments all by themselves. The protocol regarding the health care needs of a refugee can be initiated as soon as they land in Canada, as in the case of families with a special care needs member such as a child with cerebral palsy or a family member with chronic disease. A pre-arrival conference is held, to help identify and plan for the healthcare needs of families so as to make appropriate preparations or arrangements for referrals upon arrival. The healthcare facilitators see to all of the health needs of newcomers who arrive in Regina and also arrange and coordinate all medical appointments until such a time they are able to find their own way to the Regina Community Clinic (RCC).

Language Assessment and Referral Center (LARC)

As newcomers arrive into a new environment, there might be a problem with language as the language spoken in their country of origin might be different from that of their country of residence now. There is then a language barrier which poses a huge challenge and this is where the Language Assessment and Referral Centre (LARC) Saskatchewan Program comes in. The program provides services to immigrants with permanent residence status at no cost, including:

- English Language Assessments using standardized testing tools

- Placement into one of the Canadian Language Benchmark levels
- Referrals to federally funded language training (LINC) programs

The LARC utilizes the following assessment tools in order to determine the client's placement into one of many federally funded English Language Classes, also known as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). The Regina Open Door Society offers one of these language classes as part of its programming for newcomers. The Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT) and the Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Placement Tool (LPT) are the two standardized assessment tools used in testing English Language learners for their English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing (Language Assessment and Referral Centre [LARC], 2019). These tools are used to determine a client's level with regards to the English Language, and based on their level, an appropriate referral is made to the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program for continuous learning.

Public Health Nurse

Within the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) organization there is a public health nurse from the Regina Public Health office under the Saskatchewan Health Authority who partners with Regina Open Door Society to provide healthcare services for newcomers. The public health nurse with Regina Open Door Society is the first point of contact for newcomers regarding their healthcare when they arrive in Canada. The initial healthcare intake is done by the public health nurse at Regina Open Door Society before a referral is sent to Regina Community Clinic for a thorough medical checkup. Refugee families in Canada are brought up to date on their immunization against diseases such as mumps, measles, polio, chicken pox, whooping cough flu, hepatitis b, among others. They continue to work with the public health nurse until all

of their immunizations are done, usually within six months to one year of their arrival into the country. Immunization is a very important piece in the settlement process because it seeks to ensure the public is safe from communicable diseases that can easily be spread if newcomers are not given the appropriate vaccines.

Within the period I was involved with RODS, I became aware of how all of these collaborative partners worked together to see to it that clients' needs were met internally, or they were referred to outside organizations if necessary. Before clients are referred, it is very important to exhaust all options available within RODS capacity first, and if clients still need support or are unable to access needed help, then resources in the community will be explored. During my practicum placement, I had to refer clients who had complex needs and multiple challenges to both Catholic Family Services and KidsFirst for ongoing family support which can be short or long term.

Current Situation of Migration in Canada

Even though migration has become a global phenomenon and affects most parts of the world, nowhere are the trends and consequences of immigration and settlement better observed than in Canada (Bauder, 2012). Toronto is now seen as the heart of immigration and settlement as Anisef and Lanphier (2003) observed; they described Toronto as resembling "the world in a city" (p. 20). The population of Toronto is diverse in terms of ethnicity, place of birth, languages spoken and religious practice. Such diversity is an important characteristic of today's global city and according to Sassen (2018), the economy and social structure of global cities are intricately linked to global migration trends which is not only of people but also of capital (human and resource) and goods. Similarly, demographic studies have shown that the recent population increase, especially in Saskatchewan, was mainly due to higher immigration levels into the province (Statistics Canada, 2016). Saskatchewan is

one of the provinces where a growing number of immigrants have decided to settle, including refugees. Between the periods of 2011-2016 the province accepted approximately 48,000 immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016). About 16,190 immigrants arrived in the City of Regina during the same period. Based on the above reference, my thought is that one will be correct to say immigrants have far reaching positive consequences on the economy of their country of residence.

Immigrants and Refugees as Service Clients

The international community distinguishes between immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers (asylees), but the literature suggests that in practice these distinctions are not always clear (Betts, 2013). In practice these three groups of people are generally seen as immigrants but whether migrants are identified as refugees, immigrants or asylees, it is important to recognise the complexity of factors driving the migration journey into their new country of residence (Dettlaff & Fong, 2016). Individuals escaping persecution in their country of origin may seek temporary protection in a neighbouring country, often times living in refugee camps, and request permission to resettle in a third country as a refugee. With this same notion, Burt and Batalova (2014) expressed that, individuals are identified as refugees if they are unable to return to their country of origin because of persecution or the threat of persecution and are granted permission while abroad to resettle in a host country. Refugees are granted protected status before arriving in their new country of residence and they therefore become the responsibility of the host government. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) also defines immigrants as people who [choose] to settle permanently in another country and refugees as those who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of widespread persecution, and who are unable to return home (CIC, 2012). Moving to another country is a decision an immigrant makes

whereas for refugees they are forced to move to another country as a matter of safety for self and family. Once a refugee or an immigrant arrives in the host country, it is imperative that they are well settled and integrated into the new country. It is important that they are made to feel comfortable in their new home and have a feeling that they are part of the society. This is key to the settlement and integration process and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Settlement and Integration into a New Home and Community

The settlement and integration of immigrants is complex and multifaceted hence, it is important to define the terms “settlement” and “integration” prior to exploring this area with regards to newcomers. In the literature, the term settlement is often used to indicate the preliminary steps in the integration process in which the initial needs of immigrants are met in domains such as housing, school registration for immigrant children, initiation of language training for adults, accessing mainstream services, and gaining a basic understanding of rights and responsibilities (Drolet, Yan, & Francis, 2012; Government of Canada, 2017; Valtonen, 2008). On the other hand, the term integration is used to refer to the “ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life - economic, social, cultural, and political” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2001, p. 6). Integration entails a desirable outcome, as immigrants are welcomed and are made members of the host society. It is used to gauge the success and failure of immigrants and to determine the efficacy of the Canadian immigration policy. An immigrant is considered to be successfully integrated if he/she adopts an official language (English or French), moves away from ethnic enclaves, and participates in social-economic and political activities of the mainstream society (Li, 2003; Tam, 2003).

Settlement and integration is a two-way process, which requires commitment on the part of the immigrants to adapt to the life in Canada, as well as a supportive attitude on the part of Canadians to welcome new people and cultures (Thomson, 2010). The process varies depending on individual needs and does not take place within a fixed time frame. The process of settlement and integration requires that housing, education, nutrition, and healthcare needs of the immigrants are met; and that immigrants participate fully and satisfyingly in the labour market, local economy, society, and community, and that immigrants achieve a sense of belonging in the community (Murphy, 2010). Settlement services can be provided directly by governments at various jurisdictional levels and through other public institutions. Services are also commonly offered by non-profit organizations in partnership with the government as in the case of Regina Open Door Society.

Richmond and Shields (2005) identified three broad stages in the settlement process which is the same process adopted by RODS in resettling refugees. The first stage is the “initial reception”, which starts right from the airport reception and includes newcomer orientation information and referral services, language training and short-term shelter. The “intermediate stage” is where appropriate employment and long-term housing, and access to education and social rights are supposed to be secured. The “final stage” involves the period when a deeper sense of attachment and belonging to the host society is meant to occur. This is the integration stage and “integration” is commonly used in Canada’s immigration discourse to refer to the desirable way by which newcomers should become members of the new society. During the integration process, immigrants often are confronted with structural obstacles such as credential recognition, institutional barriers, and discrimination. While Canada offers a fairly wide range of public supports and programs for

immigrant's settlement, especially Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) role in the initial settlement phase for government assisted refugees, more still has to be done. It also needs to be noted that, there are very often serious coordination challenges between levels of government and other public and private societal actors during the various phases of the immigrant settlement and integration experience (Shields, Drolet, & Valenzuela, 2016). These challenges, as well as other challenges will be discussed in the next section.

Challenges of Newcomer Refugees and Immigrants

Many immigrants come from traditional backgrounds and face a lot of challenges adjusting to a new country. Migrating to another place as permanent residents, newcomers carry high expectations for their lives, with the desire to have a more successful career than they had in their home country (Trumper & Wong, 2010). However, many newcomers face significant challenges in their social and economic integration (Gauthier, 2016). The major factors that are considered to be the biggest challenges to effective social and economic integration include: (a) lack of information and guidance (awareness of environment); (b) lack of recognition of foreign credentials; (c) lack of recognition of previous work experience or employers' requirement for Canadian experience; (d) lack of language skills; (e) difficulties in obtaining references; (f) prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination; (g) cultural integration; (h) social and emotional support; and (i) health and wellbeing (Alboim & McIsaac 2007; Banerjee & Phan 2014; Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Drolet et al., 2012; Gauthier, 2016; George & Chaze, 2012; Government of Canada, 2006; Lowe & Ortiz, 2015; Murphy, 2010; Ng & Omariba, 2010; Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Weiner, 2008). With my observations and experience in working with newcomers at RODS, the above nine factors found in the literature can further be reviewed under four broad categories: (a)

information and guidance about their environment (b) employment; (c) language barriers and cultural differences; and (d) health and wellbeing. Even with highly educated, skilled and business class immigrants who are considered to be “ideal” immigrants as compared to refugees, they also run into these challenges at points in their settlement journey. The role of the Regina Open Door Society has been in helping newcomers to mitigate against these challenges through programs that offer support in the integration process.

Information and Guidance (lack of awareness of their environment)

It is clear from the literature that information and guidance enable the settlement and integration of immigrants to go smoothly. Therefore, the provision of information and guidance should be recognized as necessary strategies to empower immigrants. To address this need, the Government of Canada (2015) administers a funding program through agencies like Regina Open Door Society to deliver targeted and high-quality pre-arrival and post-arrival settlement services related to information and orientation, language training, employment-related services, community connections, needs assessments and referrals, and support services. All of this information and orientation are meant to give newcomers a sense of their environment in terms of where to get what, when, and how. Also, in order to make the information and guidance accessible, usable, and culturally meaningful for immigrants, it should be made available in several languages. Regina Open Door Society has been instrumental in making information and orientation services available to newcomers in Regina in different languages using interpreters.

Employment for Newcomers

In the literature, employment is widely discussed as a highly prioritized area for the majority of immigrants (Murphy, 2010). Major factors that are considered to be

barriers to employment include a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, lack of recognition of previous work experience or employers' requirement for Canadian experience, difficulties in obtaining references, and discrimination (Alboim & McIsaac, 2007; Murphy, 2010; Weiner, 2008). These barriers to employment intersect with each other and complicate the economic integration of immigrants. For instance, in a collaborative research project involving several Toronto-based community agencies serving immigrants, Sakamoto et al. (2010) explored what Canadian experience means in the context of skilled immigrant employment, and found that Canadian experience is not only seen as a necessary requirement for obtaining employment, but it is also used by employers as a tool to discriminate against immigrants. Similarly, Houle and Yssaad (2010) found that the recognition of foreign credentials and work experience impedes not only the economic integration of skilled immigrants and refugees, but also their broader integration within the Canadian society. In addressing this need, several government and non-government immigrant-serving agencies like Regina Open Door Society collaborate with employers to offer mentorship programs to help immigrants develop their professional networks, improve their job search strategies, enhance their professional understanding, and gain insight into Canadian workplace culture. These programs are very helpful but once newcomers are empowered with working skills, there are often still issues that arise due to language barriers for many of them.

Language Barrier and Cultural Difference

Language ability is repeatedly identified as an important factor that facilitates access to the intended occupation and determines the occupational outcomes of immigrants (Grenier & Xue, 2011). Official language ability is one of the most heavily emphasized pathways to integration which aids the process. There is a general

assumption among immigrants, particularly, skilled immigrants, that improving language ability can facilitate their settlement and integration into the mainstream Canadian society (Galiev & Masoodi, 2012).

The federal and the provincial governments in Canada are addressing these needs by developing comprehensive language and culture training programs for new immigrants. One such federal initiative is the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program delivered by the Government of Canada (Government of Canada, 2017). The LINC program provides English and French language training for newcomers after an assessment is carried out, in order to identify the level of their language skills and an appropriate placement is made. Regina Open Door Society clients are assessed through the Language Assessment and Referral Centre (LARC) and placed in the LINC program within the first six months of their arrival and they have the option to be in the class either full time or part time. The LINC program gives basic workplace communication skills to newcomers to help them interact effectively with their employers, colleagues at work and people around them. Once language is addressed, another area of concern is the psycho-social and emotional wellbeing of new refugees.

Newcomer Health and Wellbeing

The process of resettling can be very stressful and stress is considered a major risk factor for a variety of physical and mental illnesses (Health Canada, 2008). Immigrants may develop poor health outcomes as they face multiple psychological stressors during settlement and integration, including change of social environment, weather conditions, adapting to new cultural norms, inability to speak the new language, finding suitable employment, experiencing decreased socioeconomic status, separation from family and friends, and lack of social support (Chadwick & Collins,

2015). On the other hand, immigrants are also less likely to experience declining health if they are highly satisfied with their settlement experience. In other words, there is a positive association between the settlement experience and the health and well-being of immigrants (George, Thomson, Chaze, & Guruge, 2015).

The social determinants of immigrant health include employment and income, socioeconomic status (Ng & Omariba, 2010), and race and ethnicity; in particular racism and discrimination (Hyman, 2009). Immigrants often experience challenges in all of these areas and as a result, they often end up in jobs that underutilize their education and skills. Unemployment and underemployment negatively impact the overall health of immigrants, more specifically, their mental health (Dean & Wilson, 2009). For instance, in a longitudinal study, skilled immigrants who were over-qualified for their current employment reported a decline in their mental health and persistent feelings of sadness, depression, or loneliness (Chen et al. 2010). The survey indicated a direct link between immigrants' poor mental health and their unmet expectations or general dissatisfaction with employment. Poor mental health leads to low morale, reduced productivity, rapid employee turnover, and higher rates of absenteeism, injuries, and long- and short-term disabilities in general (Institute for Work and Health, 2011). During my practicum with Regina Open Door Society, I met clients who were trained and educated as dentists, cardiologists, bio-chemists and engineers in their countries of origin, but due to their current status as refugees in Regina, and facing many of the challenges stated above, they are unable to work in their professional capacities; hence they have to settle for menial jobs.

RODS Programs

Settlement programs and services are designed to assist immigrants to begin the settlement process and to help them make the necessary adjustments in adapting to

their life in the host community. The goal of supporting newcomers to make a smooth transition needed to fully participate in the society is generally articulated in these program mandates. These settlement and integration programs, as well as the services provided by Regina Open Door Society associated in achieving the above goal are identified and discussed in this section.

Regina Open Door Society has a number of different departments offering different programs but the department which offers settlement and integration services within Regina Open Door Society is Settlement Family and Community Services. These services are made up of four major programs including: Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), the Orientation Services for Newcomers (OSN), Settlement Support Workers in Schools Program (SSWIS) and Welcoming Community for Newcomers (WCN). It is important to mention that some specific programs and services offered within Regina Open Door Society are provided only to landed refugees; and other programs are provided to both immigrants with legal status and refugees living in Regina. Within my practicum, I was lucky to be exposed to all of these four programs, but I spent a reasonably large amount of time in the RAP program.

An important component to be aware of in the Orientation Services for Newcomers (OSN) program is the fact that services are provided to both Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) as well as legal immigrants living in Regina. It provides newcomers with information, orientation, needs assessments (known as Matrics), settlement planning, and referrals that meet newcomers' settlement needs and goals. As new residents of a community, newcomers are taken through what is legal and illegal in Canada, especially in regards to physical discipline of children, domestic violence, and instructions on what to do during the tax season. These orientations are provided to educate newcomers on their rights and to give information on the laws of

the land so that they do not come into conflict with them. Orientations are very essential because things that might be accepted in their country of origin might not be acceptable here in Canada.

Once orientations are completed, newcomers become more aware of their environment and also have a fair idea of what is accepted and what is not. There are also walk-in sessions available to assist clients with submitting applications and answer every question they may have. In the fiscal year 2017-2018, 17,858 new and returning clients received services under OSN. In total, 18,707 new and returning clients participated in 1,425 group information and orientation sessions that took place. Services that were provided include: needs assessments, individual settlement plans, referrals, and solution-focused counselling sessions (RODS, 2017).

The Settlement Support Workers in Schools (SSWIS) program at RODS involves a partnership with Regina Public School Board, Regina Catholic Schools, the French Immersion Schools, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The aim of this program is to connect clients with resources in the community such as schools and libraries, as well as supporting school placement. Workers' duties include providing school orientations, linking newcomer students and families to the school resources, assisting students in dealing with problems of integration at school, and advocating challenges of integration on behalf of the clients. SSWIS workers also dealt with crisis interventions in schools as well as help newcomer students build their strengths and confidence in order to succeed in school. Information is also provided to newcomer parents in order to help them better understand the school systems in Canada as well as preparing their kids. In 2017, five SSWIS workers provided 897 orientations, 256 counselling sessions, 249 referrals, and 109 home visits. SSWIS also served 94 schools

and supported 3 Regina school board partners to register 1,749 newcomer students for school (RODS, 2017).

Welcoming Community for Newcomers (WCN) is a program that assists newcomers to become familiar with their community, establish supportive social networks and enhance their ability to meet their settlement goals. The main aim of the program is to help newcomers become thriving members of their community. To achieve this aim, the program matches newcomers with community volunteers who are established residents in the community and are familiar with local, social, educational and recreational systems. Volunteers work with new families to improve their language skills, learning about and experiencing life in Regina, learning about their community and government services, and accessing local community resources.

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) offers direct and immediate services and information to newly arrived Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) within four to six weeks of their arrival in Regina. RAP services contribute to a newcomer's basic establishment by facilitating a smooth transition to life in Regina, from airport reception to securing permanent accommodation in the community. Before a new family arrives in Canada, a pre-arrival case planning meeting is held to assign case workers to the family and the various tasks that need to be done in the resettlement process. The composition of the yet to arrive family as well as the healthcare needs of the families are discussed. The necessary preparations are put in place for their arrival such as the shopping for their bedding, groceries, and also preparing the receiving house (temporary accommodation). The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) provided specialized settlement services for 160 new Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) who arrived from April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. This included 60 families from Syria, 53 from Eritrea, and 47 from various other

countries. Families with complex needs such as those with a member of the family with a disability, a single mother of 4 young children and no language skills, and clients who have been through severe or traumatic experiences, may need to be case managed to provide ongoing support. Case management provides an intensive and systematic client centred approach that will provide GARs with a warm, welcoming and safe environment which is essential for a more positive settlement experience in Canada.

There are a number of workers who are part of the Resettlement Assistance Program team including: the Life Skills Worker, the Health Facilitator and the Enhanced Social Worker (ESW). The Life Skills Worker at Regina Open Door Society provides information to build essential day to day skills of maintaining safety in and around the house, and information on what to do in terms of emergency and how to dress warm for the weather in Canada. Their role is very important as they give basic survival skills to newcomers to help them cope well in their new surroundings. On the other hand, it is the Enhanced Social Worker (ESW) who sees to the socio-emotional needs of the immigrants in the resettlement process. With newcomers adjusting to new rules and norms, this can sometimes create conflict, especially in role changes which can cause a crisis situation in a family. Counselling focused on parenting skills, effective communication, dealing with traumatic situations, marriage breakdown, and physical and emotional abuse are offered to ensure that immigrants are supported enough during these difficult times. In the counselling process strength-based theory and solution focused theory were largely used to encourage clients to see beyond their current condition and believe in their own abilities to overcome their challenges. These theories and associated approaches will be discussed in detail in the next section of this report.

Social Work Theories in Practice

Completing my practicum with Regina Open Door Society has provided me with the opportunity to apply theories to enhance my personal and professional development in my chosen field. In this section I will describe and analyze my experiences in integrating the theories acquired in classes to the real job of social work practice. Social work theories offer social workers a way to identify the causes of particular problems while also providing a path of effective action. Social work professionals use their theoretical knowledge to assess and identify the type of interventions that are most likely to be successful in dealing with the presenting problem (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001). While observing the process of working with the immigrants and refugees at RODS, I found that many staff consistently applied the strength-based approach and solution focused theory in their practice. These two theories could be observed in the work of the Enhanced Social Worker (ESW) and I was privileged to prepare and deliver a presentation to staff members on strength-based practice and its importance so as to reinforce its use in dealing with clients. During my practicum, I learned how a strength-based approach is emphasized to empower immigrants and refugees in the settlement process. I observed counselling sessions on how this approach can be applied to help clients realise that they have the full potential to overcome their challenges. In my dealing with clients I also used this approach to bring about desirable outcomes. I also increased my knowledge in solution focused theory and culturally competent social work practice.

Strength-Based Approach in Practice

In the literature, a strength-based approach to social work focuses on finding and utilizing the strengths of a client in order to achieve the client's goals rather than focusing on the client's weaknesses (Nichols, 2014). These existing strengths include:

the client's education, financial assets, core skills, community networks, dreams, hopes and aspirations. The techniques used by social workers applying the strength-based approach include the use of empathy, respect, and positive expectations. This approach can help the clients to counteract their negative assumptions about the type of progress that is possible, thus revealing their true selves. In this type of practice, clients are encouraged to value themselves, create goals that are achievable, and develop realistic action plans to achieve their goals (Saleebey, 2003). Everyone has gifts, capacities, resources and inherent skills that they can utilise to address their own problems. These strengths can be in the form of life experiences, personal attributes, coping abilities, environmental resources, personal motivation, social skills and capacities. Newcomers tend to forget they have all of these strengths.

A good example of a situation where I applied a strength-based approach in dealing with clients was when I encouraged a family I was involved with to make scheduled appointments by using the bus instead of RODS having to issue a taxi voucher for the family. Initially there was some resistance from the client but I walked the client through the process of getting the bus pass and using her phone to check for the bus schedules. Eventually, the client was able to grasp the process and made it to every appointment all by herself using the bus. This helped to make her realise the potential she never knew she had. The client became so happy in discovering that there was something she could do for herself. This is an empowerment tool that a strength-based approach gives to clients to make them realise they can overcome their challenges once they see the potential in themselves. RODS clients are attempting to adjust to a new society that may be very different from the one which they came from. It is, however common, that they will face confusion, a lack of confidence or even forget who they are as they go through this adjustment period. Within the strength-

based approach, the emphasis is placed on a person's strengths as a resource, in order to solve their own problems by revealing their strengths. The strengths perspective does not belittle the client's problems or challenges but rather it brings attention to the positive attributes of the client's abilities in order to empower self. The approach puts clients in a position to think of themselves in a more positive way, which encourages them to think of themselves as not being the problem. In one of my sessions with a client, simply by making a statement like "you see, you were able to look for a new accommodation all by myself" the client was able to see how far he has come with his own efforts and he was incited to do more for himself. It became very clear to me while working with clients that, when their strengths are highlighted, they appreciated the recognition.

RODS staff and I used the strength-based approach by offering empathy and respect in order to help newcomer families gain confidence in themselves and in their capabilities. In the first few weeks of Government Assisted Refugees' (GARs) arrivals, a needs assessment is conducted to assess the strengths of the family or the individual with this approach in mind. The strength-based approach starts with an assessment and continues throughout the professional relationship with the client. During the needs assessment, clients are asked many questions in order to understand not only their needs and goals but also their existing resources (strengths). This includes asking clients about their education and professional skills, their family situation, and by identifying their supports in the community. On several occasions I conducted Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and Enhanced Social Worker (ESW) needs assessments all by myself (under clinical supervision) and I had the opportunity to use the strength-based approach first-hand. During these assessments, I helped clients to

identify their unique strengths and resources inherent in them to gain more confidence in themselves as they integrated into Canadian society.

This approach also affirms the client's problem solving capabilities and encourages self-determination, through the process of a collaborative relationship between the counsellor and the client, rather than a hegemonic relationship (Tong, 2011). This perspective additionally aligns itself with the values of the Canadian Associations of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2005), whereby there is an intrinsic importance placed on respecting the client's self-worth and dignity, through empowerment and encouragement.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy in Practice

Another approach utilised during my practicum with Regina Open Door Society was solution focused brief therapy. Very similar to strength-based practice is solution focused brief therapy which assumes that people are resilient and resourceful in the face of adversities. The problems they have (settling into a new environment) are not seen as evidence of failure to achieve the adaptive standard, but rather as normal family cycle complications (Nichols, 2014). With this notion always at the back of my mind, I listened to clients' stories and strive to help them believe that they have what it takes to overcome their challenges of integrating into the community. It is believed that people already possess the skills and resources they need to resolve their problems. Nichols (2014) explained that, as people are overwhelmed by their problems, it hinders them from recognizing their abilities, resources, as well as any successes when the problem did not exist (exceptions) or when the problem was resolved at one time. Instead of looking at the details of the problem, the focus is placed on exploring and highlighting what aspects contribute to fixing the problem.

The focus on the solutions proves to motivate people to concentrate on maintaining behaviours that will contribute to solving the problem.

Using the solution focused brief therapy approach the therapist's role is to highlight the client strengths and then assist the client to realize that they have the innate capacity to be a change agent rather than a victim of circumstance (Walsh, 2010). This approach is goal focused with the belief that change is possible, and clients have what it takes to bring about positive change. The emphasis on staying future focused is achieved by asking the miracle question for instance; if by a miracle you woke up one morning with all your problems solved, what would be different? (DeJong & Berg, 1998). With this question, individuals will start to think about what types of changes they would like to see in their lives and forecast what the future could look like for themselves. The focus then remains on the future instead of concentrating on the presenting problem.

Pichot and Dolan (2014) offers a description of some of the techniques used in solution focused brief therapy as follows: looking for previous solutions, using compliments, inviting clients to do more of what works, asking the miracle question or the exception question (when the problem did not exist), using scaling questions (rating the problem or the way they feel from 0 to 10, best to worst), and asking the coping question of how they have managed to deal with the problem until now. I was able to incorporate these questions in sessions with clients to assist them in coming up with a solution to their problems themselves. I came to know first-hand how clients can be experts of their own lives.

I found solution focused brief therapy very useful in my work with the immigrant population. My experience as a student in this environment has shown me that when highlighting success with clients, they appear to have a great sense of

dignity and leave with more confidence to face the future. Often times when I engaged with clients, they narrate how their children have quickly integrated into Canadian life, fearing they might lose control over their children and instilling their own cultural values. In these kinds of discussions, I drew their attention to the fact that they have been parents to these children even before they came to Canada. We discussed what had changed in their relationship with their children and what they would want to see happen by asking the miracle question. I realised that clients usually have a clear sense of what has to change and from there a care plan can be put in place on how to bring about the desired change (building a good relationship with the children). During sessions using this approach, I relied on the creative power of speaking positively about a problematic condition while focusing on the solutions to attain the ideal situations. Thus changing the way clients talk about their problem is all that needs to be accomplished. It is not about problem talk but solution talk. When the client and therapist talk more and more about the solution they want to construct together, they come to believe the truth and reality of what they are talking about as “this is the way language works naturally” (Berg & de Shazer, 1993, p.9).

The use of solution focus brief therapy was very helpful both to the immigrant families and for me as a practicum student with limited time. This was very effective in the sense that it brought the family to a point where they realised that something can be done to create the desired change in their family. Like the strengths-based perspective, this particular approach aligns itself with social work values which highlight the client’s right to self-determination (CASW, 2005). Nichols (2014) also explored the shortfalls of this approach pointing to a lack of empathy or understanding when clients are prevented from narrating their personal stories, as the focus is primarily on finding solutions. Clients hardly get the chance to talk about their

problems in detail as right from the beginning of the session, they are encouraged to see an end to their problems.

Culturally Responsive Social Work Practice

In my practicum, it was of the utmost importance to deliver culturally sensitive support or service due to the diverse nature of clients I served. Even though Regina Open Door Society clients come from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, it is still very necessary to offer services that are responsive to their unique cultural needs. Culturally competent practice is defined as a set of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills that a social worker must possess in order to work effectively with clients who are from a different culture than the worker (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010). Cultural competence also demands that workers develop flexibility in thinking and behaviour because they must learn to adapt professional tasks and work styles to the values, expectations and preferences of the specific clients (Pinderhughes, 1989). This means that practitioners must have a variety of strategies useful especially in working with immigrants who come from a range of cultural groups, social classes and levels of education. Moreover, a culturally responsive social worker recognizes and affirms the value and dignity of individual clients, families, and groups. As well, a social worker who is culturally competent will be able to provide services in an effective and respectful manner to clients who have different cultures and worldviews. With so many immigrants settling in Regina affirming the ideal that there is beauty and strength in diversity, it is also paramount that their needs are met culturally.

Regina is gradually becoming a city of many diverse cultures and this is evident even in the different ethnic restaurants and shops around the city. With this development, it is critical for social workers and organizations to acknowledge that

culture is a significant factor in clients' lives. Therefore, intervention strategies implemented that are relevant to and compatible with the client's culture are likely to succeed. Culture also has a great impact on how people meet their basic needs or cope with the problems of their lives. Although culture has to do with people's values, beliefs, and behaviors, social workers who work with immigrants and refugees need to understand and appreciate the client's cultural background in order to be successful in the helping process (Hepworth et al., 2010). Culture is a way of life for an individual and involves what they eat, how they dress or talk, how they think, and also influences the way they interact with people around them. As a social worker with this knowledge, I listened to client's stories without prejudging the situations in order to gather information and understand the clients more. In this way, I was able to create more trust which encouraged clients to communicate their emotions as well as facts about the problems they are facing.

Working with Regina Open Door Society is all about diversity, starting from staff complement and including diversity in the range of the clients they serve. The cultural needs of clients are also put first even if it means that the agency must provide interpreters to understand the client better, or accompanying clients to shelters because they do not feel comfortable going by themselves. During my practicum, I worked with clients from Syria, Somalia and Eritrea. Whenever I ran into difficulty with understanding their cultures, I would spend some time interacting with staff members who were from the same countries as my client in order to gain information about their culture. Moreover, the need for cultural sensitivity is not only important when working with individuals, but also when working with other agencies and community organizations. I found myself often advocating and mediating cultural issues between my clients and other agencies such as the health authority, social services, and legal

aid. Culturally responsive practice for a social worker encompasses the attitudes, training, and skills involved to recognise the diversities in the clients served as well as rendering services that are appropriate to their needs. Culturally competent social work requires a deeper understanding of the way that various cultures affect clients' sense of self and others in a multicultural society. It also requires a thorough understanding of the impact of ethnicity and racial diversity on those who belong to the dominant groups in society as well as those who are in the non-dominant groups. Culturally responsive social work necessitates an ability to interact in a respectful and therapeutic manner with clients from non-dominant parts of society (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Additionally, culturally competent social work practice helps to guide the organization to develop in a way that is respectful of multicultural values (Sue, 2006). As workers provide culturally responsive services to clients in meeting their needs, there are also other skills that they developed over time working with immigrants and refugees. In my practicum, I also explored these other skills and I applied them in my engagement with clients. Some of these specific skills will be discussed in the next section of this report.

Social Work Skills in Working with Newcomers

In this section, I looked at a number of social work skills from the perspective of my experience and professional growth that I acquired while completing my practicum at Regina Open Door Society. One needs to continually add to one's skills set to be able to work with newcomers because of their diverse nature; and also because, what worked for one client might not necessarily work for another. At the beginning of my practicum, I met with staff members from each of the programs provided by RODS and learned about the various ways in which they serve immigrants and refugees in Regina. After meeting with staff members from each program, I could

draw a link to how all the programs were connected, with each program serving a specific aspect of the immigrants' needs. Most of the staff had been in their positions for a very long time and had acquired tested skills for working effectively with newcomers over time. I became very eager to tap into their skills and experience and could not wait to start working with them. Some of the skills I acquired and learned from my work with staff and workers are elaborated on below.

Working with Interpreters

In my practicum, it was very clear to me that the translation and interpretation services at RODS played a vital role in helping new immigrants to settle and integrate well into the society. I observed that most of the staff members at RODS had experiences in working with interpreters. In order to provide professional and effective services to the clients, working with interpreters became a necessity. Interpretation services are provided under the Translation and Interpretation Program (TIP) at RODS. This program hires volunteers and trains them on how to interpret for the organisation. Areas such as confidentiality and professional expectations for interpreters are discussed (RODS, 2019c). Throughout my learning, I noticed that it is worth spending time communicating with the interpreters before meeting with the clients, as it provided the interpreters an opportunity to enrich practice, service delivery and knowledge. Learning how to use interpreters is therefore a necessary skill for social workers who provide services to individuals from multicultural backgrounds. It is important to remember that an interpreter is an essential link between the social worker and the client when there is a language barrier (Tribe & Keefe, 2009).

I was very privileged to work so many times with Arabic, Tigrinya and French interpreters during sessions with clients and in conducting assessments. With the process of using interpreters, I learned that I needed to speak slowly and in short

sentences for the interpreter to remember and interpret what was said. It was also very important to pay more attention to making eye contact with the clients rather than with the interpreters in order to create a comfortable atmosphere. I found that it was much easier to get into the zone of talking to the interpreter instead of the client and so I had to put more effort into building a rapport with the client. When this skill is mastered, we are able to show respect and avoid “objectifying” the client thus, losing sight of the person and making the person an object or problem (Tribe & Keefe, 2009). I also found that it was important to take the time for feedback and clarification when working with immigrants and refugees. People’s assumptions are usually based on their social and cultural experiences (Raval & Tribe, 2014). Hence, using an interpreter in working with newcomer clients is an effective way to clarify any misunderstandings that may occur. It was also useful for me to book interpreters well in advance before meeting with client, a lesson I learned the hard way. In one situation I made arrangements to meet with a client and started looking for an interpreter a day before our meeting and unfortunately all of the Arabic interpreters were booked. Consequently, my client showed up the next day, with me not having an interpreter. I was lucky to have another practicum student with me who could speak Arabic to help me out.

Making Referrals to Programs and Services

Internal and external referrals can be made for clients after a need assessment is completed and client’s needs are clearly identified. In some situations during my practicum, clients were better served by other agencies like Employment Services, Catholic Family Services especially when there is a need for an ongoing counselling to deal with traumatic incidences as well as support in life skills training. Having knowledge of resources out in the community to serve clients and the ability to

refer clients when appropriate is a necessary skill for every social worker. This is very important because for a practitioner to help a client it is necessary to have the knowledge of services and be well informed of the resources both within the agency and outside in the community; including detailed knowledge about what they are able to offer clients. Resources in the community (external resources), include such places as: Transition House, Family Service Regina, My Aunt's place, Wish, Foodbank, Regina Housing Authority, Mobile Crisis, The Early learning Centers, Legal Aid, Family Law Services, The Caring Place, 211 Saskatchewan, Sofia House, and the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability Program and are very good resources for a social worker to have in her repertoire. Resources within Regina Open Door Society (internal resources) include such programs as Orientation Services for Newcomers (OSN) programs, the Youth Program, Families in Transition Program, Integrating Newcomers with Volunteer Opportunities to add Leadership Value through Education (INVOLVE), No Body is Perfect Parenting Class, and Conversation Circles. I was very lucky to learn about all of these resources which a newcomer can benefit from during my practicum with Regina Open Door Society.

A significant task within my role as a practicum student was to refer clients to appropriate services and programs within the RODS and with the community. It was very important to be aware of all of the services and programs provided at RODS, and in the community that were mentioned above, in order to refer clients to the appropriate resource. Making referrals was not an easy task. So as to avoid failure in the referral process, I had to clearly identify the client's needs and concerns before making the referral. To identify the need, a needs assessment was completed. In my practicum experience, I referred clients to the KidsFirst program when it was identified that, they were pregnant for the first time in Canada or they were first time moms

needing support. Also, the KidsFirst program helps mothers in their parenting skills when they are referred. I also referred a family I was involved with to Catholic Family Service when I identified that they needed ongoing counselling due to a traumatic experience they encountered when fleeing the war that had broken out in their home country. It was also very essential that I reviewed the eligibility criteria before referring clients so as to make sure they were accepted into the program. As part of my learning experience, I also learned that, once a referral is made, it is very critical for a social worker to make frequent follow ups to check in on clients to ensure that they are receiving and benefiting from the intended services. Following up on clients after they are referred also allows the practitioner to measure clients' progress and offer extra support or make additional referrals for clients if needed. With the type of client population served by this agency, and the existing problem of language barriers, a simple phone call follow-up was often sufficient to confirm that clients made it to their referred program or agency.

Report Writing and Documentation

Throughout my practicum I wrote a lot, be it writing case notes, documenting incidences, taking minutes of meetings, recording or updating client contact logs, or just reporting on the services provided for clients. I also reported on some of the success and the challenges that I experienced while working with clients. My reports were reviewed by the team leader and then were submitted to my professional associate (supervisor) who gave me feedback on how I performed including areas that I had to work on. In this way, I was able to develop a close relationship through constant communication with my supervisor who also offered close monitoring. I used simple and direct sentences to describe the success and the challenges in my reports and tried to be objective when disclosing the issues that I had

encountered. These reports helped me sharpen my writing skills, communication skills, social work vocabulary and overall English skills in a formal and professional setting.

Documentation is very important in the field of social work, as I witnessed. It serves as a proof of what has been done for the client. Failure to document can be interpreted to mean that services were not provided, as there is nothing documented. As social workers we might not always be present at work and in our absence, a colleague needs to be able to continue with your clients who need services. Proper documentation will help a colleague to know where the client is at so as to avoid duplication of services.

Building Helping Relationships

Social work is viewed and described as a helping profession, hence building a therapeutic relationship with a client is very essential for a successful social work practice outcome. According to Brammer and MacDonald (2003), social workers providing direct services to individuals and families will strive to develop a professional relationship characterized by qualities known to positively affect the outcome of the helping process. Communication with acceptance, empathy, and personal warmth are the key factors contributing to a helping relationship. This is especially true when working with clients whose first language is not English. During my practicum, I developed several helping skills such as learning how to greet clients with a warm and welcoming attitude, and learning how to explain the role of Regina Open Door Society in their settlement journey in clear and concise language that the client could understand. Moreover, I also developed skills in describing how I could be of help while giving them choice and options, listening actively by providing verbal and nonverbal cues, and I also learned open communication skills encouraging the clients' feedback on how their integration experiences had been. I also learned that it is

important to provide constant reassurance to clients during the helping process highlighting that we (workers) are there to help them. These skills put clients at ease and make services more accessible to clients.

Non-verbal Communication Skills in Language Barriers

The various forms of communication skills have a significant nonverbal component, including eye contact, gestures, body language and other movements to deliver the message or information. Since I was working in an environment where language barriers existed, I found that a lot of the communication that occurs during a face-to-face conversation is nonverbal. It was especially true for the clients who had language barriers, as nonverbal communication becomes an effective tool for exchanging information. I tried to build non-verbal communication with clients which could mean something simple like a “thumbs up” to mean all is good or the client understands what I have said. In addition, when working with new immigrants, I realized the importance of observing nonverbal cues of clients. I found that I could understand what the client was trying to express in words through their nonverbal cues. It was very obvious in a counselling session that the client’s actions and emotions truly reflected their thoughts and feelings when they were communicating.

Understanding Feelings and Emotions of Newcomers

An important part of a social worker’s role is to read and understand human emotions and feelings. Many of the clients who come to Regina Open Door Society are in their first week of arriving in Regina with so many challenges. They often may feel confused, frightened, worried, or even overwhelmed by coming to a new country. Facial expressions such as sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and joy are recognizable around the world, regardless of culture (Kim, 1995). In my practicum setting, I worked with several Syrian families regarding their settlement problems in Regina. The

greatest challenge for this population was the language, and the lack of awareness of their environment. They felt overwhelmed, helpless, and lonely because they were experiencing difficulties in all aspects of their lives, including the seemingly simple things like paying for bills, withdrawing money from bank accounts, signing up for a cell phone plan, getting a job and so on. As a newcomer myself, I had gone through similar experiences when I arrived in Regina and therefore could empathise as well as understand how they felt facing these challenges. One good thing that calms newcomers down is the reassurance that quickly they will learn a lot and things will be much easier than they are initially. Time and patience is all that they need to settle into the Canadian system.

The Experiences in Working Directly with Newcomer Families

Working directly with newcomers was one of my learning goals for my practicum. Therefore, with the support and guidance of my professional associate, I worked directly with newly arrived families for four weeks. I met the families as they arrived and had the first contact with RODS and saw their gradual progress from the settlement phase through to their integration into their community and exiting the RODS programs. Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) case workers told me that recently the majority of immigrants and refugees were from Asia, India and Syria respectively. My practicum experience also confirms this immigration trend.

During my work with the RAP team, I participated in an airport reception for a new arrival of refugees coming from their country of residence. I was involved in the initial contact through to the reception house until they moved to their permanent home. The reception house is the temporary accommodation provided by RODS for refugees to stay in within the first week of their arrival until they find their permanent home (this is the home they find with the help of their case worker in the community and are moved

into from the reception house). I observed that when serving newcomers, a practitioner's roles and tasks were various and one had to be flexible. Workers needed to have some flexibility in the hours they worked and in the activities they provided. This meant working beyond the 8:00 am – 5:00 pm work day. Sometimes a caseworker could have a family arriving in Regina at 8:30 pm and she will have to be at the airport to receive the family into their new country. Others times, there could be a case of emergency or family crisis and the only person a newcomer knows and can count on will be the case worker. RAP caseworkers help newly arrived families with their immediate essential information such as the house they will be spending their first night in (reception house). Orientation is also given on safety measures, what to do if there is an emergency and life skills needed for their present location. Also at the airport, the caseworker will make sure the newly arrived family or the individual came with the right documentation which includes their Single Journey Travelling Document (serving as a passport because most refugees will not have passports for their travel), their Temporary Permanent Resident Paper (landing paper), and the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) document which they will use if there is health emergency or the need to see a doctor.

On the day after their arrival, the caseworker will assist the family to acquire their Social Insurance Numbers, open a bank account and pick up groceries and cleaning materials for their stay in the temporary accommodation. Full details and guidance regarding settlement issues and what the family should expect in the first couple of days are explained to them. The caseworker assists the family to acquire permanent accommodation, help them in setting out the rent payment, as well as understanding the tenancy agreement form and insurance. Thereafter, the newcomer family make their first move into the community with the help of the life skills worker to furnish their new place. It is worth mentioning that IRCC is the sole sponsor for refugees coming under

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and so they provide funds for their resettlement into Regina.

Once they have settled into their permanent accommodation, other assessments such as language through the Language Assessment and Referral Centre (LARC) and school placement for the children will be set up. Children of school age will be placed in schools, and parents will be placed in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program to improve their English language skills. Other skills such as searching for, or how to apply for a job in Regina, going for a job interview, how to write a CV, and so on, are taught to newcomers to empower them in their integration process. It is the hope that when all these resources are provided to a new family they will be able to start to integrate well into the main stream Canadian society.

Code of Ethics

In every profession there are ethical guidelines to direct the behaviour of those who work within that profession; however, having guidelines does not guarantee that ethical standards will always be met (CASW, 2005). Social workers in Saskatchewan are guided by the CASW Code of Ethics. The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure that social workers always act in good faith and with sound judgment in their duties of helping people realise their full potential. A cornerstone of professional social work relationships is confidentiality with respect to all matters associated with professional service to clients (CASW, 2005).

At Regina Open Door Society, as soon as a professional relationship is established and clients are assigned a social worker or a case manager, the client is informed of their right to receive service and their right to confidentiality between client and a worker. Clients are also informed about when and why that confidentiality could ever be broken. The process of confidentiality practices are outlined in the CASW Code

of Ethics which states that, “Social workers demonstrate transparency with respect to limits of confidentiality that apply to their professional practice by clearly communicating these limitations early in their relationship” (CASW, 2005, p. 8). In alignment with the CASW Code of Ethics, within RODS confidentiality can be broken to a third party when there is foreseeable and imminent harm to a client or others in situations like child abuse and suicide. In my practice with RODS, I also observed that when clients are assured of confidentiality they felt very comfortable opening up and expressing themselves in detail.

It is also paramount that I mention acquiring informed consent from clients at the beginning of the professional relationship. As cited in the CASW Code of Ethics (2005), “Informed Consent is a voluntary agreement reached by a capable client based on information about foreseeable risks and benefits associated with the agreement (e.g., participation in counselling or agreement to disclose social work report to a third party)” (p. 10). At RODS the confidentiality agreement form and the informed consent to release information to both internal and external programs and agencies (the Authorization to Release Information) when necessary, are two major forms that all workers endeavour to explain and have clients sign at the initial stages. Very early in my practicum I got into this habit and I would not start working with a client unless these two forms were signed. I could understand why they were so important because as a social worker we all have the responsibility to perform our due diligence.

While I was participating in the practicum, I personally encountered the ethical challenge of maintaining confidentiality of client records as I moved from one program to the other within RODS. For instance, I had an experience with a client and became aware of her information because I sat in one of her sessions with counsellor on domestic violence. Days later she visited another staff member to get help with submitting an

application, and I was present to assist the staff member. I had to maintain client confidentiality when dealing with members of the staff who worked in different programs in order not to share any information irrelevant to that staff member or to that particular situation. Confidential information should only be shared with people who are within a client's circle of care. This situation really reinforced my classroom learning about ethical considerations in social work practice and I knew I was learning how to practice as an ethical social worker.

Conclusion

In this final part of this report I will first discuss my goals and visions for future work as a social worker. This will be followed by my conclusion about the practicum experience and my identified achievements during the placement.

Vision

I am especially pleased that I chose to do my practicum at the Regina Open Door Society because I had the opportunity to meet and interact with many immigrants and refugees who had recently arrived in Regina. I was able to directly experience the immigrants' accounts of the difficulties and challenges they faced as a result of moving to a different country. I could also see how beneficial it was for them to have the types of services that were provided by RODS. The goals I set for myself were to become a professional social worker in working with immigrants and refugees. I also stated that I wanted to strengthen my social work skills in order to influence, encourage and empower newcomers in their integration into Canada. And, I wanted to assess immigrants' situations, advocate for their rights and needs, determine the community resources available, and work with those who collaborate with RODS in helping refugees adapt to Canadian society.

I have a vision to help newcomers realise their full potential by creating the understanding that Canada is full of opportunities and they can become whatever they want to be just by believing in their strengths. To be able to achieve this, I noticed that professionals need to further their scope of strategies and approaches to assist in the integration process, not necessarily only within Regina Open Door Society, but as professionals in the larger community. They need to recognise the diverse nature of the current population coming to Regina and go the extra mile for clients who may have language barriers. I believe that it is important for each social worker to evaluate his/her personal capacities, values, and setbacks before selecting one's practice field. Professional job satisfaction is very important and closely linked to the readiness of the worker to serve others with care. With immigrants and refugees, it is essential to focus on the improvement of the client's social functioning and that means that social work practice should involve engagement, empowerment, treatment, patience and a big heart that genuinely cares. I would love to see more and more refugees and newcomer immigrants contribute to Canadian society by participating in community activities and volunteering. This way they can also give back to the community they were welcomed in to, as well as refine or use their new English language skills. It is my hope that our society today will be able to strengthen its recognition of the contribution of immigrants and refugees in all sectors of the economy while striving to end discrimination against immigrants.

Practicum Achievements

I greatly enjoyed my practicum experience and appreciated every opportunity provided by RODS. The opportunities to gain social work skills by observing staff members' daily work and communicating with workers from the different programs helped me achieve my first to learning goal which was to develop and improve my

graduate level social work knowledge and skills in working with newcomers. The opportunities to work directly with newly-arrived families, to deliver a presentation on the strength-based approach to staff members, and to conduct a parental survey for the KidsFirst program all enhanced my skills in social work practice. The opportunities to attend several presentations and training sessions in the community empowered and increased my knowledge of external resources I can refer clients to. More so, the research and write ups that were required as part of this practicum report further advanced my writing skills and understanding of social work frameworks of culturally responsive practice. Last, but not the least, over the past years of my experience in my career, I have often seen programs which were neatly drafted on paper but when it comes to its implementation very little was done to that effect. It was very comforting to see RODS programs not only on paper, but by actually observing and being part of the team carrying these programs out. As well, witnessing the impact that these programs are making in the daily life of a newcomer, one is correct to say that RODS is achieving its mission as an organization. With these programs in place to support newcomer, there has been the need for settlement and integration to move slowly away from the responsibility of the host country onto refugees and immigrants themselves. This is good as it shows the effects of RODS programs on refugees' self-determination and independence.

Through this practicum, I discovered that I would likely continue working to support newcomers in my future social work practice because of the satisfaction I got from serving this population. The experience has certainly been the starting point for my career in social work in Canada working with immigrants and refugees. It has also been a meaningful and rewarding journey for me. Newcomers are very appreciative of the services they receive, which makes the job uniquely satisfying. My heart is filled with pride every time I see clients fully integrated into the community and accessing

resources within it. Every achievement of the clients encourages me to work harder to help the next newly arrived families into Regina to achieve even more of their dreams. It is my belief that every dream that comes true will eventually benefit Canada in the long run.

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