

**MANITOBA RURAL IMMIGRATION  
COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES**

**Winkler**

**RDI Working Paper #2005-8**

**April 2005**

## **Rural Development Institute, Brandon University**

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**Rural Development Institute  
Brandon University  
Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A9  
Canada**

**Prepared by:**  
Ray Silvius, M.A.

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# **Introduction to Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies**

The information contained in this report is part of a series of four case studies of community/regional immigration initiatives in Manitoba. Sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, these case studies were undertaken with the understanding that the findings from four diverse community/regional experiences with rural immigration in Manitoba can assist in exposing innovative practices, lessons learned and further considerations for communities wishing to develop strategies for immigrant attraction, settlement and retention.

It needs to be stressed that this and other case studies each offer a snapshot in time, a collection of impressions and commentary on immigration goals, challenges and responses at a particular point on the continuum of attraction, settlement, and retention. As such, findings are historical and impressionistic and meant to prove instructive for further research and policy considerations, facilitate collaboration between communities and government and initiate contact between communities and immigrants, all for the purposes of strengthening efforts directed towards regional immigration, settlement and retention.

## ***Methodology and Project Developments***

For the project, four communities/regions were chosen by Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM) on the basis of being instructive with regards to processes and initiatives relating to rural immigration. LIM provided contact information for appropriate stakeholders in each community, who via email, phone and/or in person contact offered input/perspective on community immigration processes. Interviews and/or focus groups were arranged with immigrants through local contacts.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of each area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

An initial series of working papers of findings was developed in collaboration with personnel from LIM and the communities being studied. This material was then offered during two sessions in Brandon, Manitoba at the end of April:

- to participants at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation-Rural Development Institute (CRRF-RDI) National Rural Think Tank 2005 on the theme of rural immigration; and
- to Manitoba community representatives attending the “Developing a Community Immigration Strategy” seminar held by RDI and LIM at Manitoba’s Rural Forum.

At the latter, representatives from RDI, LIM and the communities involved also presented findings of the study. Further consultation with LIM and the communities in question was sought to develop the document into its present form.

# Executive Summary

## ***History and Context***

The City of Winkler and Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce have been active in pursuing/supporting immigration to satisfy the area's human resource needs. Manitoba government personnel responsible for immigration have been actively engaged on the matter, beginning in 1997. The "Winkler Initiative" pilot project resulted from this engagement, whereby immigrants arrived in the area based on meeting provincial criteria. In 1998, an agreement was signed between the province and its federal counterparts to bring the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) into being, making for more opportunities for new arrivals in the area, building on demand and connections already established. Predominant groups in the region have been Russian-German, German and Kanadier - Mennonites who had at one point left the area to settle in parts of Mexico and Central and South America. Broad segments of the community have taken a keen and active interest throughout the recent immigration initiatives. According to Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM), Winkler itself has witnessed the arrival of 1832 immigrants from 1999-2004.

## ***Existing Supports and Initiatives***

Some of the specific existing supports identified during this project include:

**Settlement Services:** Throughout the duration of the immigration initiative, settlement services have been based in Winkler. These are currently in the offices of the South Central Settlement and Employment Services (SCSES), which is responsive to regional needs. Settlement workers are actively sought by new arrivals; their role and capacity have expanded and formalized to meet demand.

**Language:** English language classes have grown in number through Pembina Valley Language/Education for Adults (PVLEA); these are offered on site in several communities throughout the region. High and Low German are spoken in Winkler.

**Education:** Garden Valley School Division facilitates contact between prospective immigrants and schools during exploratory visits to the community. Large numbers of immigrant arrivals provide challenges for the education system. Currently, there is no knowledge of where immigrants will settle or what schools the children will attend and funding does not respond quickly enough to new needs. These arrivals also provide opportunities, as immigrant arrivals have stimulated demand for more teachers and provided a new cultural element in the schools. Ensuring immigrant students' inclusion in school is a priority.

**Health:** The immigrant population has been identified in the planning of new and enhanced health care services, though there is a lag in funding to address these needs. Some new arrivals exhibit unwillingness to or a lack of understanding how to access the system for preventative or on going care. Some staff can offer translation services, however, language differences continue to pose a difficulty for health care delivery. Several new health care

workers have been hired to respond to growing demand, and a number of immigrants have been employed in the health care field within the area.

**Employer/Employment:** A buoyant economy facilitates immigration. Cooperation by the business community ensures immigrants have jobs when they arrive. Many employers have offered jobs through the PNP and general immigrant streams enhance immigration opportunities through walk-ups and word of mouth referrals, bringing new arrivals to businesses without specific job offers. Underemployment (including not working in one's field), higher wage expectations and misinformation about credentials recognition are frustrating for immigrant workers, though many have displayed high levels of adaptability.

**Additional:** Connections between immigrants who have arrived and potential/eventual arrivals facilitate greater linkages between the area and overseas, offering considerable support, assistance and incentive for greater numbers arriving in the region. The Mennonite Central Committee and Church Elders have assisted with Kanadier resettlement/reintegration in the community. Successful service provision and support has required outreach, recognizing gaps and needs and then responding appropriately. Consultants have been active agents facilitating the arrival of large numbers of families to the region, though opinions vary considerably about their role and value.

### ***Immigrants' Perspective- German / Russian-German Population***

During focus groups conducted with a number of Winkler immigrants, immigrants' perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of community living were shared and discussed. The specific comments of these focus group participants are summarized below:

#### **German / Russian-German Population**

**Positive Aspects of Living in Community, Pull Factors:** German spoken in community; positive impression of school system; welcoming community (church, settlement workers, English teachers, community at large); environment (space, air, outdoor life); linkages of relatives, friends, church, consultants; availability of jobs; Provincial Nominee Program.

**Negatives Aspects of Living in Community/Immigration Process:** Lack of apartments/houses; still challenging without English; credential recognition and language issues; lack of or misinformation result in many being unable to attain desired employment; general lack of information (credentials, housing, employment insurance, disability); fewer doctors and specialists than accustomed to; lack of recreation facilities and opportunities for young people; family reunification.

### ***Conclusion***

As the "original" generator of contemporary rural immigration in Manitoba, Winkler offers experiences that are instructive and promising when considering the possibilities of rural immigration in the province. Winkler serves as an encouraging example of what may be achieved in a rural immigration initiative when there exists close collaboration between business, city officials and Manitoba Labour and Immigration.



Due to the area's predominant religious, cultural, linguistic and economic elements, it remains appropriate to ask how this particular experience may or may not be reproduced elsewhere in the province. A widening of the immigration process should affect more of the surrounding region and provide more lessons still. The Winkler example stresses the importance for stakeholder preparation, interaction and co-operation, as well as appropriate supports and services for the immigrant population.

## **Recommendations and Lessons from the Winkler Case Study**

**Personal linkages and word of mouth** - through family, friends and/or a church community - **facilitate immigration, settlement and retention, as does previous exposure to an area from visiting.** Nonetheless, it remains important for city officials, consultants and any involved in the recruitment process to convey accurate information and stress that both Canada and the city in question are not for everyone. Despite such linkages assisting new arrivals in the settlement and integration process, a community needs to be proactive in the process of determining the needs of immigrants prior to arrival and continuously after arrival, as contact and settlement produces unexpected challenges and developments. For example, temporary housing is crucial for the initial transition into a community.

**Make immigrant families aware of the existing continuum of services and settlement agencies and provide linkages to these,** regardless of the supports an immigrant utilized in arriving. The vast settlement experience of the area reinforces that each immigrant brings a complex and diverse set of needs and challenges, even in the cases where there exist elements of linguistic, cultural and religious continuity.

**Make all efforts to contact and welcome immigrants. This is beneficial to both the new arrival and community at large.** Efforts at intake and needs assessment are required for the best provision of services possible. This is enabled by a greater ability to measure immigration flows and knowledge surrounding who is coming to the community. Information gaps and lack of contact remain considerable challenges for any service provider.

**A broader immigration strategy to address what are felt to be specific needs may be required.** For example, business development has resulted from the influx of skilled workers, who develop contacts, knowledge, resources and networks of support after arrival that foster entrepreneurship. Economic development personnel can help by giving as much information and support as possible to immigrants who wish to start businesses.

## **Recommended Further Research on Case Study**

- Rural areas continue to grapple with issues of service provision for new arrivals: what lessons can be learned from Winkler? Has a growing demand for services led to greater specialization?
- What have been the regional impacts of immigration? To what extent has intra regional mobility occurred, and has this strengthened regional immigration?
- To what extent have skilled immigrant workers initiated entrepreneurial ventures? Have immigrant mobility in workplace and job satisfaction changed over time?

- What are the effects of isolation on immigrants, particularly women, in isolated rural areas?
- How are new arrivals reproducing modes of living and preferences? How does this impact the community?
- In time, are retention efforts successful? Is there a different retention rate amongst the different immigrant populations/cohorts, and if so why? For example, do the more 'secular' Germans have the same retention rate as Russian-Germans?
- What have been the experiences of non-Russian-German, German and Kanadier arrivals in the area?
- To what extent has secondary migration to the region occurred? What is the impact?
- What are the activities of Winkler area consultants elsewhere in province? What is the impact?

## Introduction and Methodology

Winkler and area is one of the four community/regional case studies under investigation, chosen after being identified by personnel from Manitoba Labour and Immigration as having undertaken distinct immigration initiatives and responded to large immigration flows, from which important lessons and recommendations can be drawn.

For the intended purposes of the case studies, qualitative and impressionistic information was sought directly from those involved in the immigration process. Contact was established and information gathered by phone conversation, email correspondence and/or in person contact from individuals in each community/region who had themselves played important roles in immigration processes to date and/or could recommend further key contacts. It should be noted that due to the time and travel constraints of the project, not all recommended contacts were successfully reached. In some cases, those reached felt they had little relevant information to offer to the project.

Interviews were arranged with immigrants through local contacts. Time constraints, the comfort level of immigrant subjects and language concerns factored in the determination of the interview procedure. When possible, a focus group setting was established to permit greater levels of interaction and idea generation amongst immigration subjects. Semi-structured and open interviews were used, as well. The hybrid methods, employed out of necessity due to time concerns and the willingness of subjects to participate, did not lend to a neat systematization of findings. It is suggested that further follow up in this area would be fruitful.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of the area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

The information provided by immigrants and additional community contacts has been summarized and analyzed to present general history, trends and impressions. Further input and recommendations have been sought from community contacts and Manitoba Labour and Immigration, and this document reflects their input.

## **Immigration to Winkler and Area- History and Context**

The Winkler area is no stranger to the movement of people. It has long witnessed the return of Kanadier, Mennonites who had at one point left the area to settle in parts of Mexico and Central and South America. Smaller numbers of other immigrants have looked to establish themselves in the area for some time, as well. Nor is the Province of Manitoba unfamiliar with such movements in the area, having in the past provided English language training to these Kanadier and others. Winkler's recent immigration boom, however, begins as a concerted response to the community's economic needs and is enmeshed with developments of Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

Numerous jobs were unfilled in the community in the mid 1990s, compromising immediate human resource requirements and jeopardizing the expansion of operations, particularly in industries and the agricultural sector. Citizenship and Multiculturalism, the Manitoban government division responsible for immigration at the time, was approached by the City of Winkler and Chamber of Commerce in 1997 to determine whether there were opportunities to utilize immigration to address the community's human resource needs.

Winkler's keen interest in bringing workers spurred further discussions between the province and Human Resources and Development Canada, as there remained the belief that clearly displaying human resources needs would facilitate the immigration process. Job offers were sought and community members with connections in Germany identified individuals and families who would be a good fit and encouraged them to apply to immigrate. However, those who applied were unable to realize federal points requirements.

These developments occurred at a time when Manitoban authorities were intensifying efforts at attracting immigration to the province. In 1997, the province undertook a promotional campaign entitled "Manitoba Advantage," developing brochures and information for prospective immigrants and undertaking exploratory promotional visits to Europe, Philippines and South America.

It was soon apparent to provincial personnel that promotional activities alone were insufficient at generating the desired response of increased arrivals, so they began seeking greater input and capacity vis-à-vis the federal government to address and manage the province's immigration needs. At the same time, Manitoba was in the process of negotiating with their federal counterparts the framework of what was to eventually become the PNP. They concurrently discussed the prospects of developing a pilot initiative that would allow fifty families to settle in the Winkler area. In what became the "Winkler Initiative," immigrants could arrive based on their meeting provincial selection criteria, with the province assuming responsibility for care after arrival.

The agreement that brought the PNP into being was signed in June 1998, and Manitoba had an initial allotment of 200 principal applicants for that year. The "Winkler Initiative" contributed to early, successful PNP arrivals, having both established a critical mass of new arrivals that could provide information to other prospective immigrants and also

highlighting Winkler as a desirable area. Similarly, the PNP provided greater opportunity to expand immigration initiatives to the area.

Realizing the feasibility of the PNP, Manitoban authorities negotiated with federal counterparts to increase the province’s allotment of landings under the program. This was done annually until the province successfully negotiated being able to themselves determine the number of desired arrivals, and in 2003 a target of 10,000 immigrants was set by Manitoba.

**Table 1: Immigration to Winkler 1999-2004**

<b>Immigration to Winkler</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1999	226
2000	244
2001	260
2002	226
2003	411
2004	465
<b>Total</b>	<b>1832</b>

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada; prepared by Manitoba Labour and Immigration, May 2005

Predominant groups of new arrivals in Winkler include Russian-Germans (German nationals who had repatriated to Germany from Russia/Soviet Union), others from Germany as well as returning Kanadier. The Kanadier generally have pre-existing citizenship rights, yet require and access many of the same services as the official “immigrants”. It remains important to stress that between these predominant groups, as well as the increasing streams of immigrants from other areas, expectations vary greatly. For many Russian-German immigrants, Winkler and area offer the favorable conditions of German linguistic and religious linkages along with the familiar geography of Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

The Chamber of Commerce formed the Immigration Integration Committee after the first wave of arrivals and became the main community contact for immigration concerns. It soon became a full time operational committee involving the city, province, economic development and the Chamber of Commerce. Such a process is emblematic of the recent immigration history in Winkler and area, in which the community has taken a keen and active interest in working with the province and offered a concerted effort to facilitate the arrival of immigrants, as well as address the apparent and growing settlement and integration needs after their arrival.

Though Winkler was the recipient of much initial attention and arrivals, the immigration experience was not confined to city limits alone. Immigrants to the area have exercised a right to roam, searching for the ideal place to settle with the hopes of practicing a certain

rural mode of living on small acreages or finding other fits in surrounding communities, who have themselves witnessed the benefits and challenges of receiving new arrivals.

Recently, the Town of Morden and its Chamber of Commerce sought to bring a greater number of immigrants, but only if the community at large was behind it. There was a sense that the community didn't want to grow too quickly: it remained cautious and hoped to learn from the experience of others. The process of getting all interested parties on board - city, employers and the community at large - took considerable time, according to one Morden contact, an immigrant entrepreneur long involved in immigration processes in the community.

Morden didn't seek to target specific numbers or large scaled immigration, but rather a process of "manageable growth", according to its Community Development Officer (CDO). Word of mouth attracted new arrivals, with new immigrants becoming "the recruiters" for other immigrants. With Winkler being the primary destination for many, Morden would receive a trickle. The CDO became the de facto settlement person in the community with the rising demand in services, leading to the need for stronger ties with the settlement office in Winkler.

**Table 2: Immigration to Morden 1999-2004**

<b>Immigration to Morden</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1999	3
2000	7
2001	4
2002	32
2003	23
2004	73
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada; Prepared by Manitoba Labour and Immigration, May 2005

Recognizing the importance of immigration to sustained community growth, various stakeholders have continued to offer considerable support for immigration processes and pursuits, including a proactive approach to deal with potential problems before they arise. Immigration consultants continue to be pressed to answer the requests that families in Germany make for their services. Previous waves of immigrants further lend to the process through sustaining information flows and tangible links between Winkler and families, friends, and communities in the country of origin. With burgeoning ties between Winkler and area and places and people overseas, particularly in Germany, interest in immigration to the area has remained high.

Despite the involvement of many stakeholders in the immigration processes since day one, there remains a sense that the depth and speed of the immigration process has

challenged community capacity and responsiveness. As the impact of these numbers has become apparent, so has the need to both engage the community to a greater degree and organize efforts on a community and regional level to respond to the increased needs for service provision and support.

## Settlement

Though many immigrants to the area have utilized immigration consultants and personal networks to first arrive and settle, settlement services remain the crucial link for immigrants to connect to the multitude of community services required for successful settlement. Immigrants have consistently approached Winkler's settlement workers with any and all conceivable questions, from how to enroll a child in school to how to bring the family's horses from overseas.

Settlement services began out of the Winkler office in 1998 when settlement workers were hired for the Winkler Immigration Integration Program. Settlement workers originally worked out of their homes, and though this is no longer the case, they continue to receive calls at home. This is reflective of the settlement workers' invaluable role in the lives of new immigrants and their conscious efforts to build trust between the immigrant population and settlement workers. The new office of the **South Central Settlement and Employment Services (SCSES)** was opened in November 2004, centralizing settlement, employment and ESL services in one location.

Settlement services offered include:

- Information/orientation about life in south Central Manitoba and Canada
- Language interpretation
- Information about health care, education, banking, the law, shopping, housing, etc.
- Connection to community services - doctors, dentists, schools, etc.
- Connection to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes
- Filling out forms – Manitoba Health, social insurance, Child Tax Benefits, travel documents, citizenship, permanent residence cards, etc.
- Support, information and assistance concerning immigration issues, including acting as liaison and resource for the community
- Employment assistance

SCSES is funded through the Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce by the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program of LIM and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training (Source: adapted from SCSES brochure).

Though Winkler is the base of operations, settlement services are regional in scope and have always taken a regional dimension, responding to needs as they have arisen in places such as Morden and Altona. An increased demand for services and the conscious effort to provide regional services has led to considerable outreach to outlying communities and the eventual formalization of services. One settlement worker presently

has regularized visits to Morden, and other communities now have formal representation on the SCSES board.

Settlement services respond to all needs of new arrivals, both those anticipated as being common to new arrivals and those unanticipated, meaning that challenges exist in providing both standardized services and remaining flexible enough to respond to such diverse, often individualized needs. The office stresses the need for outreach and engagement with the immigrant population, as many remain disconnected from the organization and uninformed of the services offered.

Settlement services are then responsible for recognizing and addressing service gaps. They have the challenge of responding to the increased need of large numbers of arrivals from the PNP before funding for supportive programming can catch up to the demand. Furthermore, efforts are required to clarify the role of settlement services, both to the community at large and the immigrant community, and convey that the services are of a provincially funded program and separate from the work of consultants.

The office has benefited from being able to share resources and networks, as well as accessing the models and resources of other settlement programs. For example, Winnipeg settlement organizations have been particularly helpful, though programs from these organizations need to be adapted for rural situations. Settlement services have published a Welcome to Winkler booklet, which contains important orientation information. They have also developed a brochure in English and High German with information on settlement services.

## Language

Both High and Low German are spoken in the community to a considerable degree, allowing many immigrants from Germany and returning Mennonites from Mexico, Central and South America to communicate with others in the community without having strong capabilities in English. However, there is a growing sense that English is becoming more essential for many aspects of community life and in certain job scenarios, though the extent to which new arrivals seek and need to integrate into the wider community varies.

**Pembina Valley Language/Education for Adults (PVLEA)** was initiated in 1989 in response to a need for literacy and ESL classes for the Kanadier Mennonites. The program has grown considerably in size as a result of the influx of European immigrants and currently accommodates more than 300 adult ESL students and 15 instructors. PVLEA has recognized the importance of, as one contact suggested, “going where the learners are” and offer courses as situations warrant. Currently, classes are offered in Winkler, Morden, Altona, Rhineland Village, Plum Coulee and Rosenfeld. The province provides funds both for PVLEA’s programs and workplace adult language training in the area.

Funding, though, remains a challenge. Winkler does offer full time language training through Red River College, yet PVLEA has the desire to offer full time language services for newcomers, as well as an entry program that teaches English for settlement purposes. Some funding has been offered to address the need of offering classes for new arrivals in



the summer. PVLEA seeks to use volunteer resources and implement a language partners program, though insufficient human resources exist at present to coordinate such initiatives.

## Education

As will be mentioned further on, the quality of education in the area and certain attractive features of the Canadian school system in general are powerful motivating forces for many immigrant families in coming to the area. The **Garden Valley School Division** facilitates linkages by touring prospective immigrants in the schools during exploratory visits to the community.

Large numbers of immigrant arrivals provide both opportunities and challenges for the education system. A contact with the school division mentioned that smaller numbers dispersed widely enough are manageable, but numbers accumulated over time provide a challenge to the division. He stated that while knowing that 120 new principal applicants have been approved to come to Winkler alone, the school division has no idea where they will settle or what schools their children will attend. Funding is not quick enough to respond to the immediate needs, and schools have had to respond to the large numbers by adding portable classrooms. An increased demand for services has led to the need to hire more teachers, bringing more professionals into the community.

The inclusion of immigrant students in the school system remains a top goal. This includes offering adequate supports and providing opportunities for immigrant students to highlight their culture through speaking about previous experiences. Liaison workers provide the crucial link between school and parent and ESL support is available in the classroom.

Some arrivals may be hesitant to embrace the school system due to different values toward education. A school liaison with Winkler Elementary spoke of making home visits to ensure fathers are included in the discussion about Canadian school systems and involved in decisions regarding their children's education. Able to communicate in their language, she is a "safe person" to contact, and parents can call and express their concerns or ask for clarification of school notes or activities.

## Health

Similarly, health care services have had to respond to the considerable influx of immigrants. According to an area contact in the health field, the immigrant population has been identified in the planning of new and enhanced health care services, though there is lag in funding to address these needs, and overall it has been difficult to add the appropriate services. Some immigrants lack a complete understanding of how to access the system for preventative or ongoing care, or display an unwillingness to do so. Some staff can offer translation services, but language differences continue to pose a difficulty for health care delivery. A growth in request for medical services, partially due to the growth of the immigrant population, has resulted in the hiring of several new health care workers, and a number of immigrants have been employed in the health care field.

## Community Supports

Strong linkages with previously arrived and settled immigrants and certain cultural, linguistic, family and religious continuities offer great comfort and assistance to many newcomers from Germany. Immigrants in the area receive numerous phone calls from their previous country and requests for more information. Anecdotal information from several about the region and immigration processes suggested that those who have left the community for elsewhere were those that had no strong affiliation with a church or additional social contacts. The Mennonite Central Committee has been pivotal in assisting the Kanadier population to immigrate and resettle, and Church Elders have been influential in helping this population reintegrate into the community.

Such continuities, however, imply neither cultural homogeneity nor a seamless transition, nor do they diminish the need for organized settlement services. Certain linkages and elements might facilitate the arrival of newcomers with these pre-existing networks, though community complexities don't guarantee automatic settlement even for those with stronger connections.

Home visits are important for welcoming, making an initial connection and providing a friendly face and all important phone number to call for whatever reason. In the case of immigrants, who responds to the need for service provision is often determined by who notices the need. For example, an ESL class in the area has put together a paper on what to look for in buying a house after the need was expressed in that forum. One contact mentioned that though beyond her primary mandate to assist families in the school system, she often transports and translates for medical, dental, or optometrist appointments, provides books to immigrant families to encourage reading in the home, and, along with others, organizes "free" garage sales for low income and immigrant families.

Winkler, Morden and Altona each have recently responded to housing needs by providing a transition house that newly arrived immigrants can stay in while making permanent housing arrangements. Not only do these houses provide needed temporary accommodations, they provide the opportunity for first contact with individuals in the community.

Morden's CDO stated that she receives calls from community members asking whether they are doing enough to assist the immigrant population. Community engagement is key to the process of immigrant integration and Morden's community newsletter has been used to encourage the town's residents to contact settlement services if they know a family that could benefit from them.

Opinions vary considerably about the role and value of consultants in facilitating the arrival and settlement of immigrants. In the Winkler/Morden context, consultants have been active agents who have on many levels facilitated the arrival of vast numbers of families and therefore, cannot be ignored in the analysis. Though not formally required in an application to the PNP, consultants have become the first point of contact for many immigrant/prospective immigrant families, often offering services in a prospective immigrant family's language, and providing a direct, tangible link, often in the prospective immigrant's own country, town or even home. Consultants assist in

arranging community visits, picking up prospective immigrants at the airport, arranging documents and temporary accommodations and lobbying for applicants when their applications are in the process of review. While these are not a replacement for the no-fee settlement services, they are heavily utilized.

## **Immigrants' Perspective: Key Findings**

Due to the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, the information presented by immigrants poses challenges to neat systematization and generalizations. Nonetheless, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weaknesses in attracting and retaining immigrants. It should be restated that the intent of contacting immigrants in this study was to receive qualitative feedback and impressions on the immigration and settlement experience to inform future initiatives with regards to welcoming, settlement and retention.

### ***German / Russian-German Population***

Three focus groups were held, with the German/Russian-German immigrants totaling 23 participants. Thirteen of these submitted part of a questionnaire to compliment focus group findings. As well, four submitted complete questionnaires (see Appendix B). These findings are presented in broader categories below:

#### **Positive Aspects about Community and What Factored in Choosing and Settling in Winkler and Area**

A significant draw to the community and area for this group is the extent to which German is spoken. Also, it was cited that the availability of English classes and that the government assists in providing these was impressive. It is greatly appreciated when translation services are offered, formally or informally.

Participants overwhelmingly reported school to be a positive factor, citing that their children enjoyed school on the whole more so than in Germany, that there was greater discipline in school and that teachers were understanding of the students' adjustment period. The schools have a very positive reputation.

Many reported a positive experience with people in the community in general and were particularly pleased with English teachers and settlement workers, the latter group being indispensable in the settlement process. Many reported feeling more at home in Winkler and area than they had previously in Germany after emigrating from Russia. The existence of particular church communities is both comforting and welcoming.

Many expressed great satisfaction with the environment and quality of life in the area. For example, the climate and landscape is very similar to that of Russia/former Soviet Union, where many grew up; in fact, some reported feeling at home because of this. The accessibility of space, clear air and outdoor life is enjoyed.

Relatives, friends, one's church community and consultants create linkages that facilitate the arrival and settlement of many immigrants from Germany. Many reported having visited the area before.

The availability of jobs is a drawing factor for many, in particular being able to find a job quickly upon arriving. One respondent stated that it was easier to start a business in the area than in Germany.

Immigration to the area is greatly enabled by the PNP, as many with an interest in immigrating to Manitoba/Canada can do so on this program when they otherwise may not be able to based on federal criteria.

## **Negative / Challenging Aspects about Community / Immigration Process**

The lack of apartments and temporary housing makes for a difficult transition into the area.

Despite large numbers of people speaking German in the community, arriving and settling with a lack of English is challenging.

A great deal of frustration was expressed over being unable to have a preferred occupation due to low levels of English and/or issues surrounding credentials recognition. Specifically, many felt they had been misled in hearing that their particular skill or trade was in high demand only to find out upon arrival that there were considerable impediments to realizing their preferred employment. There is a general lack of knowledge of how to gain necessary accreditation and who to contact to determine this. Many are working in positions different from their normal occupation.

Many of those contacted expressed frustration over a general lack of information - credential recognition, that house improvements lead to higher taxes, how to access worker's compensation or employment insurance. Much of this is related to language: many felt capable of determining such things if they had greater capacity in English.

Some expressed concerns with the medical system, specifically, there are too few doctors and specialists in the area and having to pay for dental appointments.

Some cited a lack of recreational facilities and opportunities for young people as disappointing.

Difficulties surrounding family reunification remain a concern.

One cited difficulty in starting a business because he wasn't of the local religion.

## **Additional Recommendations / Comments from Immigrants**

Other immigrants will benefit from taking English classes as soon as possible, and more classes that accommodate one's level of knowledge would be helpful.

Distribute information about the community, particularly that jobs are available.

Higher paying jobs are needed.

Save money before you come.

It is believed that houses cost more when purchased from Germany.

It should be made easier for immigrants to start businesses.

Many immigrants are willing to help out new arrivals because of the assistance they have received. Some receive phone calls from Germany from other prospective immigrants seeking information.

Most did not or found it difficult to answer how long they anticipated staying in the region.

Most came directly to the region from Germany, as opposed to landing first elsewhere. Some have moved around in the region already.

## Employer / Employment

Three area businesses that have employed immigrants and several members of the area's business community offered perspective on the immigration and employment connection. It needs to be mentioned that, according to figures from Manitoba Labour and Immigration, ninety-two employers from Winkler and twenty-nine from Morden have offered employment for the PNP; therefore, specific commentary is at times anecdotal and not necessarily representative of the wider perspective and experience of employers. Nonetheless, such commentary is indicative of some of the challenges and opportunities that have been encountered and provides insight into what factors need to be considered when developing immigration strategies to suit employment needs.

As mentioned, the immigration phenomenon in the area was initially driven by concerns of employers. A buoyant economy in Winkler means plentiful job opportunities: it is estimated that two hundred to two hundred and fifty jobs are waiting to be filled at any time. One contact stated that job offers for the PNP were initially forthcoming until many saw the length of time it took to process. Still, there exists co-operation on the part of the businesses to ensure that immigrants have jobs when they arrived.

Jobs in Winkler are therefore plentiful, and many employers and those connected with immigration speak openly about what a good fit the immigrant workers are in the workplace. One contact suggested that Germans are in fact "the ideal immigrant" for the area, as many are production workers with other cultural and linguistic fits, as well as the finances to sustain themselves throughout the immigration process.

Underemployment (including not working in one's field) and unmet expectations or misinformation about potential work and credential recognition can be considerably distressing for immigrants. There was a sense on the part of many contacts that immigrants will follow the jobs in their preferred field and move away if need be to a situation where they are more comfortable.

Some employers offer ESL at the workplace. To varying degrees, other German-speaking staff members can ease the language burden and may find themselves providing informal supports to immigrant workers, such as translating documents and arranging medical appointments.

Not all employers recruit directly or utilize the PNP. General immigrant streams to the area and word of mouth of other employees assist in bringing immigrant workers to the workplace.

Some immigrants, most notably skilled workers, come with higher wage expectations and may be overqualified for the available jobs, though display high degrees of adaptability to the circumstances of the area. One contact mentioned that on the part of some of the German immigrants, cultural expectations in the workplace and those towards the availability of government grants conflict with the Canadian and area reality.

## Conclusion

As the “original” generator of contemporary rural immigration in Manitoba, Winkler offers experiences that are instructive and promising when considering the possibilities of rural immigration in the province. Winkler serves as an encouraging example of what may be achieved in a rural immigration initiative in the province when there exists close collaboration between business, city officials and Manitoba Labour and Immigration. Due to the area’s predominant religious, cultural, linguistic and economic elements, it remains appropriate to ask how this particular experience may or may not be reproduced elsewhere in the province. A widening of the immigration process should affect more of the surrounding region and provide more lessons still. The Winkler example stresses the importance for stakeholder preparation, interaction and co-operation, as well as appropriate supports and services for the immigrant population.

### ***Additional Challenges, Recommendations and Lessons***

**Personal linkages and word of mouth** - through family, friends and/or a church community - **facilitate immigration, settlement and retention, as does previous exposure to an area from visiting.** Word of mouth remains a powerful force in bringing people to a community.

**Make immigrant families aware of the existing continuum of services and settlement agencies and provide linkages to these,** regardless of the supports an immigrant utilized in arriving. Efforts at intake and needs assessment are required for the best provision of services possible. This is enabled by a greater ability to measure immigration flows and knowledge surrounding who is coming to the community.

**Convey accurate information and address information gaps.** It remains important for city officials, consultants and any involved in the recruitment process to convey accurate information and stress that both Canada and the city in question are not for everyone. Information gaps and lack of contact remain considerable challenges for any service provider. Those responsible for business development can be of assistance by giving as much information and support as possible to immigrants who wish to start businesses.

**A broader immigration strategy may be required to address what are felt to be specific needs.** For example, business development has resulted from the influx of skilled workers, who develop contacts, knowledge, resources and networks of support after arrival that foster entrepreneurship. As one immigrant entrepreneur stated emphatically, “Don’t underestimate the skilled workers!”

**Each immigrant brings a complex and diverse set of needs and challenges.** The vast settlement experience of Winkler and Morden reinforces this, even in the cases where there exist elements of linguistic, cultural and religious continuity.

**Make all efforts to contact and welcome immigrants at a point of contact comfortable for the immigrant.** Immigrants are building on their own experience and lessons and facilitating transitions through formal and informal networks of previous and prospective arrivals.



**Temporary housing** is crucial for the initial transition into a community.

### ***Recommended Further Research on Case Study***

- Rural areas continue to grapple with issues of service provision for new arrivals: what lessons can be learned from Winkler? Has a growing demand for services led to greater specialization?
- What have been the regional impacts of immigration? To what extent has intra regional mobility occurred, and has this strengthened regional immigration?
- To what extent have skilled immigrant workers initiated entrepreneurial ventures? Have immigrant mobility in workplace and job satisfaction changed over time?
- What are the effects of isolation on immigrants, particularly women, in isolated rural areas?
- How are new arrivals reproducing modes of living and preferences? How does this impact the community?
- In time, are retention efforts successful? Is there a different retention rate amongst the different immigrant populations/cohorts, and if so why? For example, do the more 'secular' Germans have the same retention rate as Russian-Germans?
- What have been the experiences of non-Russian-German, German and Kanadier arrivals in the area?
- To what extent has secondary migration to the region occurred? What is the impact?
- What are the activities of Winkler area consultants elsewhere in province? What is the impact?

## Appendix A: Resource List and Contact Information

- Town of Altona website: <http://www.townofaltona.com/>
- Town of Morden website: <http://www.mordenmb.com/>  
(Contains information on immigration)
- City of Winkler website: <http://www.cityofwinkler.ca>
- *Welcome to Winkler* Booklet  
Offers newcomers orientation information on essential services, including their location and phone numbers. Available in English and High German.
- Settlement Office Brochures  
Briefly outlines settlement services available and contact information for the settlement workers and employment facilitator. Available in English and High German.

For further information on material and Winkler's immigration program contact:

Laurie Sawatzky  
Program Coordinator  
South Central Settlement & Employment Services  
100 - 571 Main Street, Winkler MB R6W 1G3  
Telephone: (204) 325-4059 Fax: (204) 325-4158

Pat Gerber-Pauls and Joyce Bergen, Settlement Workers:  
(204) 325-4068

Phyllis Boulton, Employment Facilitator:  
(204) 325-4085

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(note: your name is required only for follow up by the interviewer. It will not be included in any presentation of the findings)  
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2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Year of arrival in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Original country of departure: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Additional country (countries) of residence prior to Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
9. First community of residence in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Current community of residence in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Are you currently employed? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what is your employment? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Have you had more than one place of employment in Canada? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, why did you change places of employment? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Does your normal occupation/profession (for example, your occupation in your home country) differ from your present employment?  
YES \_\_\_\_\_  $\Rightarrow$  Normal occupation/profession \_\_\_\_\_  
NO \_\_\_\_\_

14. What are the most positive aspects of living in your present community?

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15. What are the most negative/challenging aspects of living in your present community?

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16. What factors contributed to your choice to live in your present community?

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17. What helped you settle in your present community? (example: services, other people in the community, relatives)

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18. What would help other newcomers when they arrive?

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19. How long do you anticipate living in your present community? (check one)

1-2 years: \_\_\_\_\_ 3-5 years: \_\_\_\_\_ 6-10 years: \_\_\_\_\_ Over ten years: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Do you have anything you would like to add about your immigration experience?

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The role of the RDI Advisory Committee is to provide general advice and direction to the Institute on matters of rural concern. On a semi-annual basis the Committee meets to share information about issues of mutual interest in rural Manitoba and foster linkages with the constituencies they represent.